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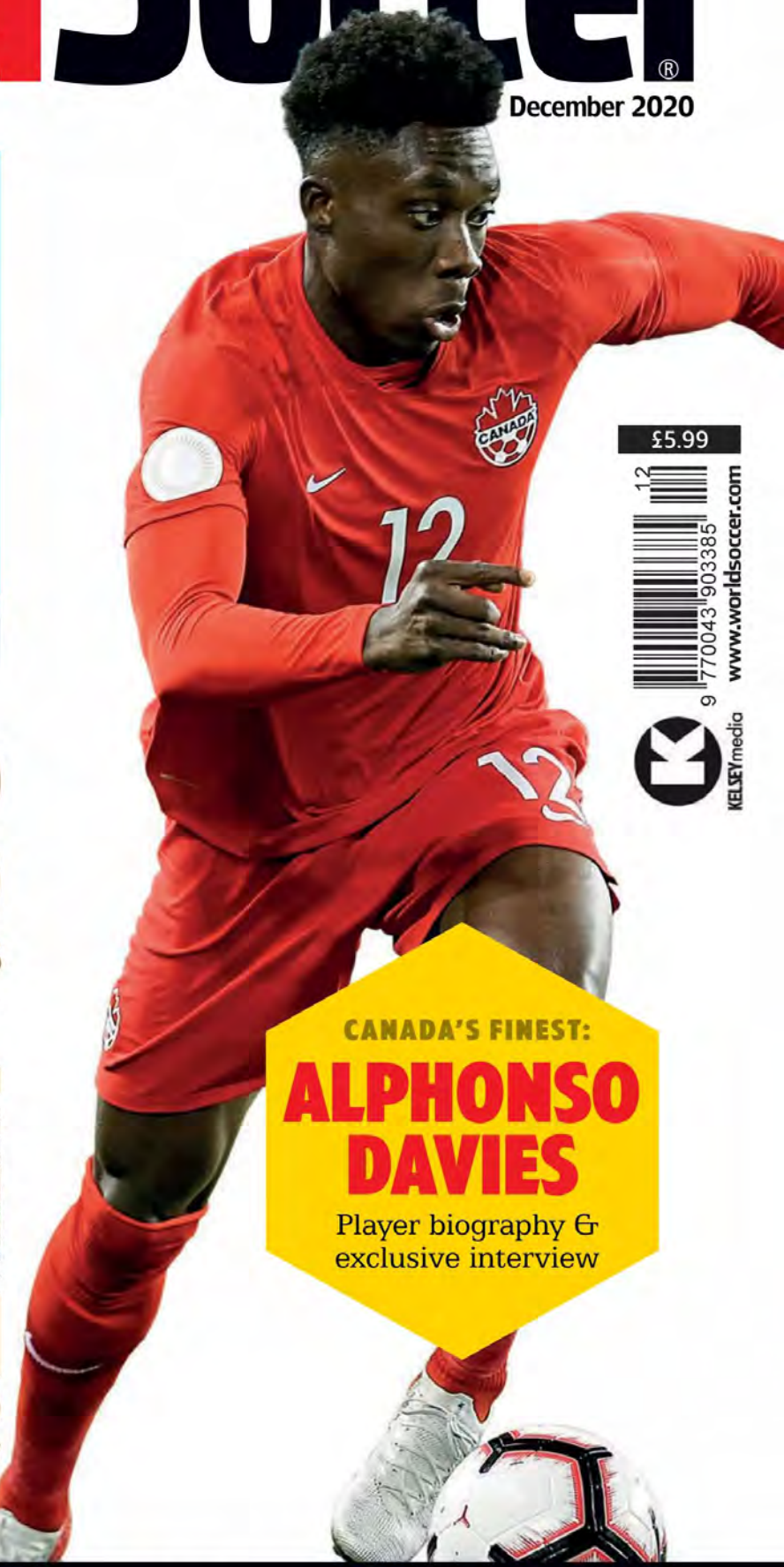

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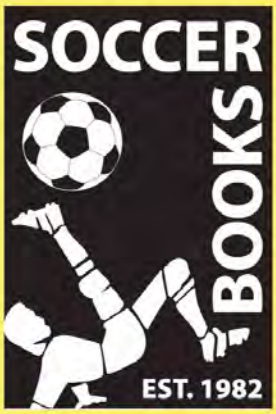

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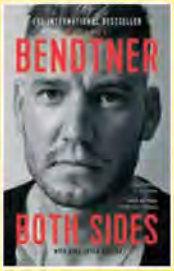

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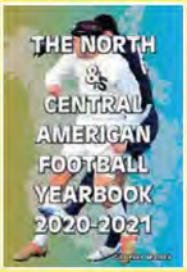

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The global game caught on camera

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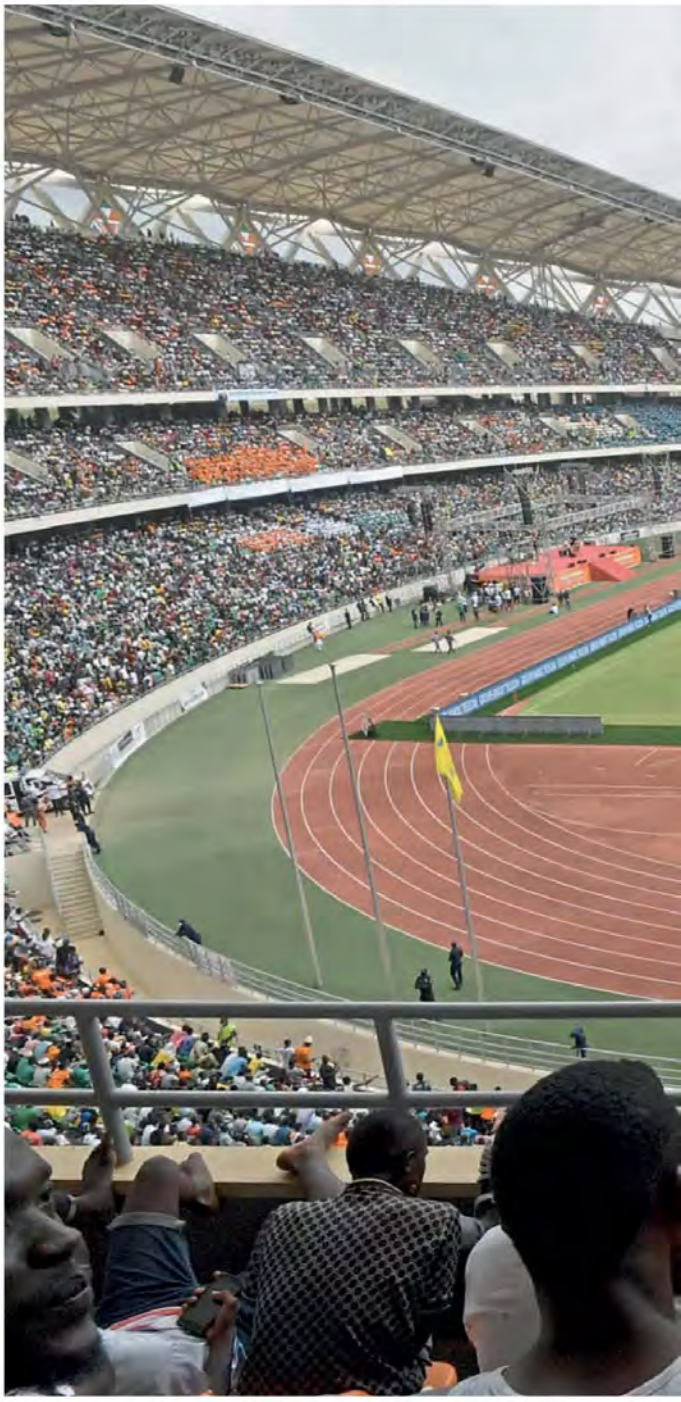
France...Raphinha attempts a bicycle kick in his final Ligue 1 game for Rennes before joining Leeds United

Bolivia...Argentina supporters watch their team train from a mountainside ahead of their World Cup qualifier in La Paz

Bosnia & Herzegovina... Northern Ireland's players take every measure to ensure that their wall isn't beaten



Sweden...Hungary's Zsofia Racz and Lilla Turanyi, and Sweden's Amanda Ilestedt all vie for the ball during their Women's Euro 2021 qualifier

Hungary...Bayern Munich lift the UEFA Super Cup after winning 2-1 against Sevilla in Budapest's Puskas Arena

Ivory Coast...Inside the inauguration of the Stade Olympique d'Ebimpe, a new 60,000-seater stadium on the outskirts of Abidjan

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FROM THE EDITOR

Every once in a while, a generational talent emerges that looks set to be a standard-bearer for the sport for years to come. We could be sticking our necks on the block with this statement, but one such player that looks ready to take up that mantle over the next decade is Bayern Munich and Canada's Alphonso Davies. After such an outstanding breakout season in 2019-20, we only thought it right to give the lightning-quick superstar-in-the-making the coverage he deserves, with an exclusive interview (page 40) and detailed player biography (page 32) on his incredible rags-to-riches story.

His emergence from Canada and MLS is a growing trend of the modern game, with the Canadian trailblazers who paved the way for him analysed in detail along with his contemporaries (page 44), while the next MLS exports being rolled off the production line are revealed in Talent Scout (page 48).

But this edition also takes a far wider look at the football landscape – both on and off the pitch. John Duerden investigates how Lebanon is using football to help rebuild the country after the Beirut blast, coronavirus pandemic and various other social, political and economic issues (page 24); Steve Menary's Special Report (page 74) examines the changes to FIFA's eligibility criteria and its impact on the international game; while Nick Bidwell provides you with an essential guide to all 32 teams in this season's Champions League (page 50) – a must read.

> Every once in a while, a generational talent emerges that looks set to be a standard-bearer for the sport for years to come

Europe's showpiece club competition isn't the only tournament we preview either – international football finally returns to Africa as the qualifiers for Cameroon 2022 recommence in November (page 88), the Indian Super League also kicks off (page 90), while the final four places at Euro 2020 will finally be decided in the play-off finals (page 80).

The world continues to be hit extremely hard in 2020, but with positive stories emerging every day through football in the form of Alphonso Davies' meteoric rise, Chapecoense's new success story (page 28) and Musa Juwara's emergence (page 29), the beautiful game can always provide a light at the end of the tunnel.

Stephen Fishlock, Group Editor

ENGLAND

Project "Big Picture" dead in the water

Plans for a raft of new changes to the English football pyramid, which would have seen one of the biggest shake-ups of the professional game since the formation of the Premier League in 1992, were shot down almost as soon as they had been proposed.

Writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, Sam Wallace unveiled details of the plans, which included giving nine clubs (the Premier League's longest-serving teams: Manchester United, Liverpool, Manchester City, Chelsea, Arsenal, Tottenham, Everton, West Ham and Southampton) preferential voting rights over the league's major decisions. The other changes, which were proposed by Liverpool and Manchester United before being rejected at a meeting of the 20 clubs in England's top flight in October included:

"The message has been lost. It is now not dissimilar to a fancy hashtag or a nice pin badge...Taking the knee will not bring about change in the game – actions will"

Les Ferdinand, QPR director of football

Shake-up...Big changes had been proposed

- The Premier League to be reduced from 20 teams to 18, with the club finishing 16th joining three Championship sides in the play-offs.
- Scrapping the EFL Cup and Community Shield.
- A payment of £100 million for the FA.
- Parachute payments for teams relegated from the Premier League to be replaced by a £250m rescue fund for the English Football League.
- Radical changes to the loan system, allowing Premier League sides to send up to four players to a single EFL club.
- 25 per cent of Premier League TV income to be distributed amongst the EFL.
- A new fan charter aiming to reduce ticket prices, subsidise away travel and introduce safe standing.

Premier League clubs however soon agreed that Project "Big Picture" would not be "endorsed or pursued". A £50m rescue package for clubs in League One and League Two was also later rejected, meaning discussions over financial support for the EFL continue to take place.

HEROES & VILLAINS

Ancient...Kazu Miura

KAZUYOSHI MIURA

The 53-year-old recently became the oldest player in J.League history, starting Yokohama's 3-2 defeat to Kawasaki Frontale. Sound familiar? That's because Miura has been breaking records every year since 2017, when he replaced Stanley Matthews as the oldest professional footballer of all time.

KARIM BENZEMA

Benzema hit his 250th goal for Real Madrid in the 2-0 win over Levante. He's now Real's fifth all-time top scorer behind Cristiano Ronaldo, Raul, Alfredo Di Stefano and Santillana.

LANDON DONOVAN

Now managing San Diego Loyal, the USA legend led his team off the pitch in a crucial USL Championship clash with Phoenix Rising after a homophobic comment was aimed at one of his players. Forfeiting the match cost Loyal a place in the play-offs, but after the alleged slur went unpunished, Donovan said: "If they're not willing to act, then we have to."

ROMA

The Italian club continues to announce new signings on social media alongside appeals for information on missing people. Chris Smalling's signing was confirmed alongside a missing teenager, and she later became the seventh person to be found safe thanks to Roma.

RYAN REYNOLDS & ROB McELHENNEY

Just months after a consortium led by actress Natalie Portman announced plans to create LA's first women's team, more plans for football investment has come out of Hollywood. Actors Reynolds and McElhenney are in talks to take control of National League side Wrexham.

CHRISTOPH METZELDER

A report in Germany has claimed that the former Dortmund, Real Madrid and Germany defender has allegedly admitted to possession of child pornography, after being charged with possession of 297 indecent images and sending similar content to three women via WhatsApp.

LUIS SUAREZ

Before joining Atletico Madrid, Suarez was in talks with Juventus, and with Serie A sides limited to how many non-EU players they can have in their squads, the Uruguayan took an Italian citizenship test. However, the University for Foreigners of Perugia (where the test was taken) is now under investigation, with suggestions that Suarez's final score was agreed beforehand and that he "demonstrated only an elementary knowledge of the Italian language."

BAMBO DIABY

The defender has been hit with a two-year ban from all forms of football activity after testing positive for Higenamine, a banned substance used to help aid weight loss. In an open letter on Barnsley's official club website he said: "I maintain my innocence, something the FA have acknowledged themselves but I must handle this decision with my family and look forward to a brighter future."

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

Football Federation Australia (FFA) was left embarrassed after neglecting to release their new away kit in women's sizes. The mistake was a particular own goal given that Australia will co-host the Women's World Cup in 2023. In a statement, the FFA said the decision was: "Not consistent with the values in which FFA seeks to uphold and promote."

Forgotten...Australia's 2019 away kit has been given an upgrade, but it failed to include women's sizes

"Jose [Mourinho] wasn't happy but there was nothing I could do about it, nature was calling!"

Eric Dier, after taking a toilet break during Tottenham v Chelsea

Giovanni REYNA

(Borussia Dortmund)

Dortmund is already home to some of the very best young players in Europe, and Reyna is very much following in the footsteps of Jadon Sancho and Erling Haaland.

After making his debut in January – breaking Christian Pulisic's record as the Bundesliga's youngest American – Reyna has this season made the step up from promising teenager to first-team match-winner. In his first three league matches, Reyna was directly involved in four goals, including three assists in one game.

Born in Sunderland to former Black Cats midfielder Claudio, Reyna has been targeted for an England call-up by the FA. The USA are determined to hold on to him though, particularly if he can repeat his father's success: Reyna senior went to four World Cups and was captain in 2006.

STEVEN BERGHUIS
(Feyenoord)
The Feyenoord skipper has made an unstoppable start to the season, with six goals inside his first four matches.

FRANCESCO CAPUTO
(Sassuolo)
The in-form striker made history by becoming the oldest player to score on his Italy debut at the age of 33.

MARVIN PARK
(Real Madrid)
Eight years after leaving Tranmere Rovers' academy, the 20-year-old midfielder was making his debut for Real Madrid in their La Liga opener.

OLIVIER GIROUD
(Chelsea)
In spite of slipping down the Chelsea pecking order, Giroud has overtaken Michel Platini as France's second-top scorer of all time with 42 goals.

YUNUS MUSAH
(Valencia)
The first Englishman to play for Valencia after making his debut in September.

JAMAL MUSIALA
(Bayern Munich)
In Bayern's 8-0 opening-day win over Schalke, the 17-year-old ex-Chelsea academy starlet came on to become the Germans' youngest-ever goalscorer.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Documentary shines spotlight on Jose the actor

Television cameras are ubiquitous in football; they capture every incident from every angle. It is why the world's favourite sport has been lumbered with VAR, and why people inside the game are forever on their guard.

How often do you see players and managers cup hands over their mouth so that endless replays cannot be used to lip-read their conversation? They learn, and they are taught early, that nothing is private in modern football.

Think of this reality if you watch *All or Nothing: Tottenham Hotspur*, the new TV series on *Amazon Prime* about life inside Spurs last season, when manager Mauricio Pochettino was sacked and replaced by Jose Mourinho.

Yes, the show is fine enough entertainment, and provides some moments of insight – as with similar series about other football clubs. But the unvarnished truth behind the scenes at Spurs? You must be joking.

Mourinho, inevitably, is the star of the show, and tried to be a loyal salesman for the product when he said: "Nothing is fake, everything is real. So, so, so, so real; nobody acted for it."

The idea is nonsense. Look, for example, at the moment in the show when a pundit on TV barks out an opinion that Mourinho is past his best as a manager. The newly-appointed Tottenham boss responds by walking towards the television screen delivering an expletive of only mild contempt.

This is an actor at work. But then Jose Mourinho is always an actor, and this is not said as criticism, but exactly the opposite. Acting is an essential part of the football manager's job. The best are masters of theatrical performance, from the noisy, stream-of-consciousness mania of Jurgen Klopp to the brooding silence of Marcelo Bielsa sitting on his upturned green bucket.

Long ago Mourinho revealed that press conferences and media interviews were his big stage, the place where he could set the agenda and help give his players freedom to relax by taking all the burden of scrutiny onto himself.

One day he'd charm the birds from the trees, the next he'd scowl with fury about the most trivial matter. The real Mourinho? No, you never saw that; the magic would be gone if you did.

When the TV show was conceived Tottenham were rising to the heights of reaching the 2019 Champions League final. Filming began as they fell apart, and Mourinho was a surprise choice as manager given that his risk-averse football philosophy is somewhat distant from Spurs' motto of "To Dare Is To Do."

There is a view that his appointment was cynically pragmatic - made with the cold calculation that the fascination with his charisma and legend would be camouflage for a sporting business struggling to finance both a splendid stadium and a splendid team.

Mourinho hates that idea. He remains convinced of his talent and destiny; think of the highly theatrical rant towards the end of his time at Manchester United when he angrily demanded "respect, respect, respect".

Tottenham happened to face Everton on the opening day of the Premier League season, providing a compelling contrast of manager with Carlo Ancelotti, who is on a similar mission to revive a major English club.

Both men have won League titles in four different countries. Both worked at Real Madrid, Chelsea and in the city of Milan. Ancelotti may be 3-2 ahead in Champions League triumphs, but Mourinho has more trophies in total.

Their styles, though, are a world apart, and Ancelotti is not concerned by the hurricane of public opinion.

Spurs lost 1-0 and immediately the vultures swooped on Mourinho, while Ancelotti was lauded. In the next game Tottenham won 5-2 at Southampton and by that time had signed superstar Gareth Bale amid a blizzard of positive headlines and clicking cameras.

It improved the mood; time will tell if it improves the team, and whether the dazzling vaudeville magic act of the Tottenham manager still has a future as resplendent as its past.

Always performing... Jose Mourinho

This is an actor at work. But then Jose Mourinho is always an actor, and this is not said as criticism, but exactly the opposite

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Infantino – a victim of his own ambition?

Gianni Infantino's worst enemy as world football supremo is not Swiss justice or any disaffected European. It is his own haste to make his mark.

FIFA presidents do not, traditionally, lose their grip on the job. The levers are too powerful. In 116 years only nine men have wielded that power. Three of them (Daniel Woolfall, Arthur Drewry and Rodolfe Seeldrayers) died in office; one stepped down because he was too busy in his day job (journalist Robert Guerin in 1906); and two retired due to old age costing them their touch (Jules Rimet and Joao Havelange).

Only one, Sir Stanley Rous in 1974, was tragically voted out of office. Few in the UK now know of the key role played by the former top referee and FA secretary in turning FIFA into a real world body and then laying the foundations for the creation of UEFA.

Infantino was elected in 2016 as a "clean" candidate. As UEFA's general secretary, he had not slithered up from the corrupt snake pit of the FIFA exco, nor was he tainted by any direct association with the rotten regime of outgoing Sepp Blatter.

He promised: "We will restore the image of FIFA to win back the respect of the entire world through our hard work and commitment and focus, once again, on this beautiful game."

Infantino arrived with plenty of goodwill. He needed only focus on three targets: to steer clear of the United States and Swiss courts as they punished FIFAGate criminality; to avoid picking unnecessary fights; and to ramp up development cash to the middling and minnow FAs. Their grateful majority would guarantee him re-election again and again.

Infantino would have been aware that, by the time he may complete a third full four-year term (notionally in 2031 when he will be "only" 61), happy supporters might even enact a statutes amendment so he could carry on wielding the cheque book.

He also knew that the old guard within FIFA were not happy with an ex-UEFA *apparatchik* as their new boss. All the more reason not only to bring over from Nyon some of his old acolytes but to ensure he played strictly by the internal rules. That should have included care over the use of private jets, the issue which had contributed to the downfall of ex-secretary general Jerome Valcke.

Infantino might have studied the reflections of predecessor Blatter on the leap from a general secretary to a president. As Blatter told this writer years after his own elevation from FIFA CEO in 1998: "I tried to do too much too soon. I should have taken time to watch, listen and learn."

Fashionably, new bosses in any sphere are tempted to quickly impress their style; a dangerous temptation. But Infantino was a man not merely in a hurry but reckless haste. Within weeks of election he threw his support behind VAR trials, reversing his own UEFA policy; he flew to Russia and Qatar to check on World Cup preparations for 2018 and 2022; then a month later he attended the UEFA Champions League final in Milan before flying down to Rome for a family audience with Pope Francis.

> Bosses in any sphere are tempted to quickly impress their style; a dangerous temptation. But Infantino was a man not merely in a hurry but reckless haste

Controversy over who paid for at least two of the flights remains a murky issue which will not go away. The ethics committee, alerted to internal concerns, decided an investigation into a new president would be unseemly.

Infantino has caused further waves by forcing out audit and compliance chairman Domenico Scala; undertaking secretive negotiations with outside investors about financing his pet expansion of the Club World Cup; upsetting African football bosses by sending Fatma Samoura, his own personal appointee as secretary-general, to run chaotic CAF for six months; and going head-to-head with Trinidadian courts over attempts to normalise the Trinidad & Tobago FA.

Nothing, however, has generated as many self-inflicted headaches for Infantino as the Michael Lauber affair. In late 2019 the Football Leaks operation revealed that Swiss Attorney-General Lauber had held unreported meetings with Infantino in July 2015 then March and April

Suspicion...Infantino continues to be under investigation

2016. Subsequently it emerged that a further secret meeting had been held between Lauber and Infantino, not in either man's office, but in the Schweizerhof hotel in Bern.

Infantino's enemies and the media leaped on the revelations. Lauber had been overseeing more than 20 FIFA case files since 2015. Why should he compromise the process by meeting Infantino? Why were the meetings secret? What was there to hide?

Worse, Lauber claimed he could not remember meetings which were not noted in his official diary. Neither he nor Infantino could remember any detail of the discussions. Infantino, on being pushed, insisted that meeting Lauber to discuss cases in which FIFA considered itself a victim of corrupt practices had been perfectly logical and that the fuss was "absurd."

But pressure was building. Formal complaints against Lauber and Infantino were registered anonymously with the judiciary in Bern and an inquiry launched. Special prosecutor Stefan Keller duly opened a criminal investigation into Infantino's actions and proposed similar for Lauber.

In the past, FIFA's response to legal trouble has been to deny wrongdoing, refuse further comment and sit out the storm. Not this time. An aggressive response has been led by Scottish deputy secretary-general Alasdair Bell. Keller's qualifications and experience have been belittled in character-assassinating leaks to local media.

It's a who-dun-it with an unusual twist: the "who" are known. It's what they "dun" which is unknown. That is the conundrum for Keller in seeking answers: innuendo is not enough.

If Lauber and Infantino maintain their amnesiac approach and no damning paperwork is uncovered, then FIFA's president will live to fight another day. But a formal charge would bring him crashing down. He dare not continue to sail so close to the wind.

Maybe it's not too late, though he may resent the source, to heed Blatter's advice to listen and learn...not least from his own mistakes. To misquote William Congreve: manage at haste, repent at leisure.

Brexit silver lining?

As if surviving COVID-19 were not sufficient, British club football is about to confront a further challenge: Brexit – an issue pushed into the shadows by the never-ending impact of the pandemic.

Yet there may be a silver lining amid the clouds of confusion. For international competition, Brexit is irrelevant. After all, only half the 55-strong membership of UEFA are European Union countries. So that means no change as far as World Cup, European Championship, Nations League, Champions League and Europa League are concerned.

Other European leagues and clubs hope the consequences of Brexit will curb the Premier League's attraction to players and broadcasters. They hope to cream off a slice of the financial action. They will hope in vain. The Premier League is likely to maintain its primacy.

Indeed, it could become even richer and more powerful. After all, the removal of EU business controls will only make it easier for Arab, Chinese and American investors to throw ever more zillions of dollars at the English game.

That is one very welcome prospect at the end of the COVID-19 crisis tunnel.

Premier League...Is English football set for more non-European investment post-Brexit?

A champagne toast

Tradition is football's foundation. Hence good to see Reims back in Europe even if their Europa League foray was ended swiftly by Hungary's Fehervar.

Reims' last European appearance had been their 1963 defeat by Feyenoord in the quarter-finals of the European Cup, where they were runners-up in 1956 and 1959 to Real Madrid. Their return duly prompted a "welcome back" message from Real president Florentino Perez.

WINNERS

EDDIE NKETIAH
Arsenal striker Nketiah is now the England U21s all-time top scorer with 14 goals in 12 games, beating Alan Shearer and Francis Jeffers' record of 13.

EUGENIE LE SOMMER
In September, Le Sommer scored twice against North Macedonia to reach 82 international goals, becoming the highest-scoring France player of all time.

NICO LODEIRO
The classy Seattle Sounders attacking midfielder has taken 14 penalties this season, and scored every single one of them – a new MLS record.

JOSEP MARIA BARTOMEU
Barcelona's presidential elections could be brought forward after a vote of no confidence was submitted against the current incumbent, Bartomeu.

ROMA
After listing 23-year-old Amadou Diawara in the Under-22 section of their squad against Verona, the Italians were penalised with a 3-0 defeat.

ARJEN ROBBEN
The legendary winger's eagerly anticipated return to Eredivisie action with Groningen lasted exactly 30 minutes before being ended by a groin injury.

LOSERS

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Evolution of the front three

The day after Tottenham completed the loan signing of Gareth Bale from Real Madrid, Son Heung-min scored four goals in a 5-2 victory against Southampton, all of them set up by Harry Kane. In the space of a weekend, Spurs offered a vision of the future and, while Jose Mourinho may no longer be at the forefront of tactical development in other regards, with a very modern front three.

Front threes have existed almost since football began. Once the 2-3-5 became the default formation in the 1870s there was a front three implicit within it, given the way the inside-forwards would typically drop deeper, feeding the wingers and the centre-forward. That was a process formalised in the late 1920s with the advent of the W-M (3-2-2-3) in response to the 1925 change to the offside law.

Through the 1950s, as one wing-half dropped deeper and one inside-forward advanced, W-M became 4-2-4, a system that both effectively neutered the traditional winger by denying him acceleration room, and allowed a greater flexibility of attack as full-backs began to advance. When the front three returned, it was as a lop-sided variant. Brazil had won the 1958 World Cup with a 4-2-4 but by 1962, when they won it again, one of their wingers had dropped deeper to create a 4-3-3. And for a while, that was the way it was: the front three consisted of a strike pairing with a forward high on one flank. That's how Nottingham Forest won the European Cup in 1979 and 1980, with John Robertson out on the left while the right-sided midfielder, Martin O'Neill or Archie Gemmill, tucked in and played deeper and narrower on the other side.

Switching roles... Kane turned provider against Southampton

Goal machine... Aubameyang has benefitted from the system

But there was also a parallel tradition that grew up in countries where a sweeper had become common. Karl Rappan's Servette were probably the first to play that way in the late 1930s: from the basic 2-3-5, one full-back became the sweeper, with the wing-halves dropping back to flank the other full-back, leaving a centre-half in midfield, who was supported by the retreat of the inside-forwards. It was a broadly symmetrical system, even if the inside-left (the 10) was often more creative than the inside-right (the 8).

> What has changed over the past half-century is how the front three now interact

It's that understanding of the 4-3-3, one that became common in Argentina, the Netherlands and Germany, that dominates the modern understanding of the formation. What has changed over the past half-century, though, is how the front three now interact.

The idea of inverted wingers, cutting in onto their stronger foot, is not new, but for a long time the idea persisted on the wide players in the 4-3-3 as essentially creators. They may weigh in with 10 goals a season or so, but their principle job was to supply the central striker. Recently, though, that has changed.

Roles have always evolved in football. Most obviously, the full-back has gone from being, as the name suggests, the most defensive outfielder as he was until the advent of the back four, to become in the modern game a source of crosses and goals, almost a deep-lying winger. But the idea of what the centre-forward should be doing and where goals should be coming from has shifted radically over the past decade. A centre-forward doesn't have to be a false nine to take on some of the characteristics of that role.

Liverpool, perhaps, are the most obvious example. At the beginning of his career, Roberto Firmino was a defensive midfielder. His greatest

asset was his understanding of space and positioning and he has brought that to bear on his interpretation of the central attacking role, dropping deep as Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah go beyond him. It's an over-simplification but their starting position means that they both are coming from deeper positions and are naturally occupying the space between the full-back and the central defender, naturally hitting the weak point of an opposing back four – something facilitated by overlapping full-backs, who at least partially occupy the opposing full-back.

But it's not just Liverpool doing it. At Arsenal, as Alexandre Lacazette has adjusted his game to drop deeper in the middle, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has thrived from a starting position on the left, which means a high proportion of the chances he has fall naturally for his favoured finish, opening his body to curl the ball into the far post with his right foot. Teams as diverse as Sheffield United and France, have been successful with non-goalscoring centre-forwards. Even Manchester City when Gabriel Jesus, a far better presser than finisher, plays centrally, are reliant on goals from wide.

Kane has always been an unusually versatile striker, somebody without one obvious outstanding attribute. He can be the prime front man, or he can also play behind him, and as such should be ideal for springing Son and Bale as they run beyond him. England, with two of Jadon Sancho, Raheem Sterling and Marcus Rashford in the wide roles may benefit as well.

The front three has undergone another evolution.

Team man...Olivier Giroud has played France's centre-forward role for years

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Out of a job... Gunnersaurus

1 GONERSAURUS

It wasn't great PR for Arsenal's board when they were forced to make Jerry Quy, the man inside the Gunnersaurus mascot suit, redundant, just days before spending £45 million on Ghana midfielder Thomas Partey.

With supporters disappointed by the decision, Quy had an unlikely hero in the shape of Mesut Ozil. The Gunners' out-of-favour midfielder offered to take a cut from his £350k-a-week wages to ensure that the club mascot stays in the job.

2 SOCIALLY-DISTANCED DEFENDING

SG Ripdorf/Molzen, a club from Germany's district leagues, had an outbreak of coronavirus ahead of their clash with Holstenstadt and didn't want any more cases. The amateur side managed to put out a team of seven players in order to avoid a €200 fine, but that was as far as they were willing to go: none of their players risked contact with their opponents, and spent the entire match socially distancing.

Did Holstenstadt take it easy? No. The final score was 37-0.

3 ALPACA INTERRUPTION

There have been far too many interruptions to football this year, but this is probably the most bizarre. English non-league side Ilkley Town were hosting Carlton Athletic in a friendly when an alpaca named Oscar strolled onto the pitch.

"Oscar the alpaca is an avid Carlton fan and often is spotted engrossed in the games on a Saturday," Carlton fan Gavin Shoesmith told *PA*. "This week he'd had enough after a shocking first half by the referee and decided he was having none of it and vaulted the fence."

4 SPEED SUBBING

Spare a thought for Lauri Suup, a 16-year-old who plays for Nomme Kalju in Estonia.

Every side in the Estonian Premier League must start each match with two homegrown players, yet there are no rules on how long they have to be on the pitch. That's why, when the ball went out after 13 seconds in the clash with FCI Levadia, Suup was instantly replaced by Ukrainian Vladyslav Khomutov, making the teenager one of the earliest substituted players of all time.

5 ATTACK FROM THE SKIES

Remember that enormous insect that landed on James Rodriguez during the 2014 World Cup? That was nothing compared to what Bruna Benites experienced during a recent training session for Brazil women's national side. Practice was brought to a halt when a macaw landed on the defender's head, with a coach using a football to tempt the neotropical parrot away.

Parrot attack... Bruna Benites

"Surely there is no country in the world where you can become a national coach after you have been fired three times in a row?"

Ex- Netherlands international Rene van der Gijp reacts to Frank de Boer's appointment

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Back in Italy... Arturo Vidal

EUROPE

Netherlands appointed **FRANK DE BOER** as their new head coach.

Three of Uruguay's all-time greats sealed transfers – **EDINSON CAVANI** joined Manchester United after leaving PSG and **DIEGO GODIN** swapped Inter for Cagliari, while Atletico Madrid paid Barcelona €6m for **LUIS SUAREZ**.

RAVEL MORRISON joined the 11th club of his career at the age of just 27, leaving Sheffield United for Dutch outfit ADO Den Haag. Similarly, **HATEM BEN ARFA** joined his ninth club, Bordeaux, while **KEVIN-PRINCE BOATENG** joined his 14th – Serie B outfit Monza.

Porto completed three Premier League loans, signing **FELIPE ANDERSON** from West Ham, **MARKO GRUJIC** from Liverpool and **MALANG SARR** from Chelsea.

Uruguay legends... Suarez, Godin and Cavani

MARIO GOTZE joined PSV on a free transfer from Borussia Dortmund, while **ERIC MAXIM CHOUPO-MOTING** left

SUMMER 2020 LATEST MAJOR DEALS

Manchester City... Ruben Dias

Liverpool... Diogo Jota

Wolves...Semedo

£62m	Ruben Dias	Benfica to Manchester City
£45m	Thomas Partey	Atletico Madrid to Arsenal
£45m	Diogo Jota	Wolverhampton Wanderers to Liverpool
£36.5m	Wesley Fofana	Saint-Etienne to Leicester City
£27.6m	Nelson Semedo	Barcelona to Wolverhampton Wanderers
£27.5m	Sergio Reguilon	Real Madrid to Tottenham Hotspur
£25m	Ben Godfrey	Norwich City to Everton
£23.5m	Rhian Brewster	Liverpool to Sheffield United
£23m	Diego Llorente	Real Sociedad to Leeds United
£22.5m	Jeremy Doku	Anderlecht to Rennes
£22m	Edouard Mendy	Rennes to Chelsea
£20m	Alexander Sorloth	Crystal Palace to RB Leipzig
£19.1m	Sergino Dest	Ajax to Barcelona
£18.2m	Amad Diallo	Atalanta to Manchester United
£18.2m	Lucas Paqueta	Milan to Lyon
£17m	Raphinha	Rennes to Leeds United
£17m	Bertrand Traore	Lyon to Aston Villa
£15m	Karlan Grant	Huddersfield to West Brom
£14.5m	Josko Gvardiol	Dinamo Zagreb to RB Leipzig
£13.6m	Alex Telles	Porto to Manchester United
£13.6m	Nicolas Otamendi	Manchester City to Benfica
£13.5m	Marc Roca	Espanyol to Bayern Munich
£13.5m	Chris Smalling	Manchester United to Roma
£12.8m	Alfred Gomis	Dijon to Rennes
£12m	Ibrahima Diallo	Brest to Southampton
£11m	Luis Henrique	Botafogo to Marseille
£10.5m	Alex Berenguer	Torino to Athletic Bilbao
£10.5m	Oussama Idrissi	AZ to Sevilla
£10m	Facundo Pellistri	Penarol to Manchester United
£10m	Davy Klaassen	Werder Bremen to Ajax

LAST-MINUTE LOANS

Jeff Reine-Adelaide Lyon to Nice
Theo Walcott Everton to Southampton
Lucas Torreira Arsenal to Atletico
Federico Chiesa Fiorentina to Juventus
Joachim Andersen Lyon to Fulham
Matteo Guendouzi Arsenal to Hertha Berlin
Justin Kluivert Roma to RB Leipzig
Tiemoue Bakayoko Chelsea to Napoli
Douglas Costa Juventus to Bayern
Ryan Sessegnon Tottenham to Hoffenheim
Danilo Pereira Porto to PSG
Juan Foyth Tottenham to Villarreal
Moise Kean Everton to PSG
Andreas Pereira Man. United to Lazio
Diogo Dalot Man. United to Milan
Ruben Loftus-Cheek Chelsea to Fulham
Daniele Rugani Juventus to Rennes
Ademola Lookman RB Leipzig to Fulham
Alvaro Morata Atletico to Juventus
Carlos Vinicius Benfica to Tottenham
Ross Barkley Chelsea to Aston Villa
Rayan Ait-Nouri Angers to Wolves
Cengiz Under Roma to Leicester

"You deserved a send-off matching who you are – one of the most important players in the club's history…Not to get thrown out like you have been. But the truth is at this point nothing surprises me"

Lionel Messi takes another swipe at the Barcelona board in his farewell message to Luis Suarez

Appointments, sackings and loans

Reunion... Federico and Gonzalo Higuain

Brothers in Miami

Federico and Gonzalo Higuain will play together again for the first time since 2007 after the pair were signed by MLS new boys Inter Miami.

Federico has been an MLS star for eight years, primarily with Columbus Crew but most recently with DC United, while Gonzalo departed Juventus in September after scoring 66 goals in 149 games.

Having joined Juve for a then-Italian record fee of €90m in 2016, his departure is the biggest loss any club has ever made on a single player.

Paris Saint-Germain for Bayern Munich.

Internazionale signed **ANDREA PINAMONTI** from Genoa for £7.2m, as well as **ARTURO VIDAL** from Barcelona and **MATTEO DARMIAN** on loan from Parma. Meanwhile, city rivals Milan signed promising Norway winger **JENS PETTER HAUGE** from Bodo/Glimt for £4.5m.

ASIA

Al Taawoun appointed **PATRICE CARTERON** as their new head coach.

Former West Ham United midfielder **RICHARD GARCIA** was named as Perth Glory's head coach.

AFRICA

Libya appointed **ALI EL MARGINI** as head coach, while Equatorial Guinea hired **JORGE COSTA** before later reversing the decision and hiring **RODOLFO BODIPO DIAZ** instead. Ethiopia opted for **WUBETU ABATE**.

JAIME PACHECO began his second spell as coach of five-time African champions Zamalek.

CONCACAF

New York Red Bulls announced **GERHARD STRUBER** as their new head coach after paying an undisclosed fee to Barnsley.

Appointed...Richard Garcia

OUT

Retiring from Croatia duty... Ivan Rakitic

Fall from grace... Wilshere and Welbeck

EUROPE

New Sevilla midfielder **IVAN RAKITIC** announced his international retirement.

West Ham United released midfielder **JACK WILSHERE** with a year remaining on his contact after just 18 appearances in two years, while **DANNY WELBECK** was also let go by Watford.

Romanian side FC U Craiova sacked their head coach **NICOLO NAPOLI** for the seventh time.

SOUTH AMERICA

JULIO COMESANA left Colombian side Junior for an astonishing ninth time just days after winning the league title.

CONCACAF

DC United announced that coach **BEN OLSEN** had departed the club.

LA Galaxy II sacked defender **OMAR ONTIVEROS** after the player was found to have used a racial slur.

AFRICA

Eight-time Zambian champions ZESCO United parted ways with long-serving coach **GEORGE LWANDAMINA**, while Tanzanian giants Young Africans sacked Serbian coach **ZLATKO KRMPOTIC** after just 37 days.

ASIA

THORSTEN FINK left as coach of Japanese side Vissel Kobe.

Striker **ADAM LE FONDRE** joined Mumbai City on loan from Sydney FC.

eyewitness

Rumen Paytashev reports

BULGARIA

From paradise to hell

At the start of 2019, Vasil Bozhkov became the owner of Levski Sofia and fans of the most popular club in Bulgaria began to dream of better times. Why? Because Bozhkov is one of Bulgaria's richest men, with an estimated worth of over 1 billion Bulgarian lev (approximately £500m). He has also been described by the US State Department as "the most infamous gangster in Bulgaria."

Nicknamed "The Skull," Bozhkov's upsurge began in the early 1990s after the changing of the political system in Bulgaria. His main business is gambling, with a number of casinos registered to his primary company, Nove Holding, while he also founded ▸

Blue Community...Supporting Levski through thick and thin

In exile...Vasil Bozhkov

Eurofootball, the first and largest private bookmaker in Bulgaria.

In 1999 he bought shares of CSKA Sofia – the most successful football club in Bulgaria – and was an owner until 2006. During this period CSKA won the league twice (in 2003 and 2005) and the cup in 2006.

According to the US Embassy in Bulgaria, Bozhkov, Grisha Ganchev (the current owner of CSKA Sofia) and Todor Batkov (the former president of Levski) are, among others, prime examples of Bulgarian businessman who combine football with organised crime. Bozhkov in particular is accused of being "active in money laundering, privatisation fraud, threats, blackmail, racketeering and illegal business with antiques."

Levski ended the 2018-19 campaign in third, with optimism that the club could end their 11-year wait for a title in Bozhkov's first full season in charge. But in January, only a year after his initial investment, everything changed.

Brothers Tsvetomir and Boyan Naydenov, owners of Efbet casinos and minority partners in Eurofootball, had accused Bozhkov of threatening to kill them, while charges of extortion and bribery were also brought against him.

In addition, the Bulgarian parliament approved the first reading of an amendment to the Gambling Act that would prohibit all lotteries but the state-run Bulgarian Sports Totalizator, following allegations that private operators had been significantly underpaying their taxes – including Bozhkov's National Lottery AD.

Bozhkov said he would stop financing Levski if the law was passed, and called on more than 10,000 Levski fans to take to the streets. Protests against the government, which began in July, were almost certainly financed by him.

As a result of the charges against him, a European arrest warrant was issued. When police entered his offices to search them, he was already in Dubai. "This time they decide to wipe me off the face of the Earth," he said. The attack against him was part of the government's wider clampdown on the Bulgarian oligarchy. "I am afraid to return to Bulgaria. I am afraid for my life. I am not a criminal," Bozhkov added.

This is not the first time that an owner of Levski has had a brush with the law. In August 2000, then owner Michel Chernoi was expelled as a "serious threat to the national assurance," accused, among other things, of laundering money. Although he was out of the country, Chernoi continued to be president of Levski over the next four years and financially supported the club. In the summer of 2004 he delivered his shares to his lawyer Todor Batkov, who was the president of Levski until 2015.

With Bozhkov fleeing to Dubai, financial support for Levski ended. He even offered the club to the Bulgarian prime minister, claiming that it was his responsibility after "the deliberate and illegal eradication of the companies providing for its maintenance."

Meanwhile, the club was plunged into crisis. Executive director Pavel Kolev said: "The club's situation is stalemate. I really don't know whether the team will finish the season. The future does not look like a bed of roses. I have no contact with Vasil Bozhkov. We are awaiting development and clearness."

Yet help did arrive from Levski's fans.

Determined to live up to their reputation as the most loyal supporters in the country, "the blue community" was united in an effort to save the club. Thousands of people queued up for match tickets and season tickets. Donations began through SMS and in just one month they collected around €750,000 – a significant amount for such a short period. The financial boost was crucial in Levski's bid for survival last season.

In the midst of all this, coach Petar Hubchev was sacked, with the team failing to win a game in 2020. This threw another spanner in the works, with the former coach demanding all the money owed up until the end of his contract.

> "The club's situation is stalemate. I really don't know whether the team will finish the season"
>
> **Pavel Kolev, Levski Sofia executive director**

Meanwhile, the issue of ownership was still outstanding. 86 per cent of the club's shares were owned by Bozhkov's "right hand" Georgi Popov, but with no finance coming from Bozhkov, the shares had to be transferred to avoid bankruptcy, with players going without pay for over two months.

Eventually, the shares were transferred to the Levski legend Nasko Sirakov – a former Bulgarian international with 78 caps, and over 200 appearances in four spells at the club – and Konstantin Papazov, a former player and head coach of Levski's basketball team. The Blue Bulgaria Supporters' Trust, a fan group, also retained ten per cent. When the deal was completed, Sirakov announced: "I am not afraid of the debts. I am sure we will save the club."

As with every other club in Europe, the coronavirus brought additional financial headaches. Levski felt the strain more than most. Yet even with games played in empty stadiums, fans continued to buy virtual and electronic tickets. The stadium was practically "sold out" in each game, helping to bring in around €150,000, while cardboard cut-outs of fans in the ground also brought in extra revenue.

Going forward, the club will place a renewed reliance on youth, with foreign imports a thing of the past. Sirakov is continuing to search for sponsors to stabilise the situation, but so far it has proven an impossible mission.

For several months, Levski walked the distance from paradise to hell, from financial and sports prosperity to the sinister abyss of bankruptcy. For the time being the club continues to dance by the edge of a razor.

Saviour... Sirakov played at two World Cups for Bulgaria

eye witness

John Duerden reports

LEBANON

Playing through a crisis

Lebanese football has suffered setback after setback, but it won't be held back

November 2019 was one of the best months in the history of Lebanese football. It started with Beirut's Al Ahed lifting the AFC Cup, Asia's second-tier club competition reserved for "developing nations." There was some rare optimism and celebration of a first international trophy at club or country level.

"It should be noted that Ahed's manager Bassem Marmar is a Lebanese coach," a delighted statement from the federation said. "When other clubs search for foreign coaches, Ahed kept faith in their coach [and] have found their very own Pep Guardiola but with the mindset of Helenio Herrera. This win is for Ahed and Lebanon as a whole, a win we must capitalise and build on to upgrade the game in Lebanon."

These were heady words but reflected the feeling, and success at club level seemed to be helping the

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8

national team too. Two weeks later, "The Cedars" held the mighty South Korea, with Son Heung-min leading the attack, to a draw in qualification for the 2022 World Cup, a result that followed wins over Turkmenistan and Sri Lanka. With three games of the second stage remaining, the Cedars are just a point off the top spot. Making it to the final round was by no means a given but, here too, there was optimism.

Not anymore. The national team has not played a game in 2020, with coronavirus bringing Asian football to a halt. But the outbreak is far from the only problem that Lebanon has had to deal with.

The 2019-20 season started but Al Ahed played just one game before it was suspended in January. This was not an early response to the spread of COVID but due to political, social and economic issues. Amid growing anti-government protests, the basketball and volleyball leagues stopped and football just couldn't continue either.

"We took every effort to avoid the worst decision, since cancelling an entire sports season is disastrous to any sport and to football in particular. But the economic crisis has impacted all industries," Lebanese Football Association's president Hachem Haidar said. "The security situation, in particular the heavy clashes between protesters and security forces, compelled us, begrudgingly, to suspend the season."

There was talk of a return to stadiums when the situation improved but that did not happen. Anti-government protests did stop but that was because of the arrival of COVID-19 rather than any breakthrough elsewhere. In May, the season was officially written off.

In terms of public health, the global pandemic has not hit the country of almost seven million as badly as some of those in Europe and elsewhere. At the end of September, there had been a relatively small 347 deaths from just over 11,000 cases. The economic effects on the already struggling country have been devastating however and the football industry has not escaped.

"It came at a really bad time," Wael Akram Chehayeb, chairman of the Lebanon FA's marketing committee, said. "We tried to get football back and it just didn't happen, then COVID-19 came and that was it."

From an economic point of view, football in Lebanon has long been in a more precarious position than most in the Middle East. For decades, the country has been trying to catch up with the rest of the region.

In 1982, when Kuwait, a country with a smaller population, was playing at the World Cup, Lebanon was seven years into a bloody civil war and had just been invaded by Israel. In 1990 when the United Arab Emirates, another regional rival with a smaller population, reached Italia '90, the war was still four months away from ending. It obviously devastated everything. When football finally returned, it was a long way behind. There wasn't enough money around to close the gap.

Unlike elsewhere in the Middle East, there were no wealthy sheiks and few businessmen looking to own clubs in Lebanon. Lots of big-name stars and coaches have spent time in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar but the likes of Diego Maradona, Gabriel Batistuta or Xavi never made it to Beirut.

There may not have been much money in football but there has long been plenty of the kind of sectarian politics that have been part of Lebanese life since independence from France in 1943. In fact, the lack of money has allowed politicians and other groups to get involved in Lebanese football relatively cheaply.

Teams such as Sagesse SC were founded by Maronite Catholics with the Druze community leaning towards Safa. And then there is Al Ahed. They have

Goalscorer...Nader Matar celebrates Lebanon's opener v Turkmenistan

World Cup qualifier... Lebanon ahead of last year's clash with South Korea

Winners...Al Ahed celebrate with the AFC Cup

been labelled as the team of Hezbollah, a Shia Islamist political party that was designated as a terrorist group in 1997 by the United States. Officially formed in 1985 as a response to Israel's invasion, the organisation has become deeply embedded in Lebanese politics, society and football, though little is said openly about its relationship with the beautiful game.

Then there are clubs that appeal mainly to the Sunni Muslim community, such as Al Ansar and Al Nejmeh. Rafic Hariri, the former prime minister, was a supporter, with his name adorning Nejmeh's Stadium. His assassination in 2005 was another turning point in the country's history and one that was not unconnected to football. It sparked unrest, and the rising violence and tensions that ensued in stadiums meant that no fans were allowed in to watch games for a full six years.

That period was damaging. The crowd violence had turned a lot of other fans off going to games but having no fans at all meant that broadcasters started to lose interest which meant even less revenue and more interference. Facilities became worse.

Yet Lebanon loves football and when fans were allowed back in 2011 the situation improved. There was less violence and better atmospheres. The whole experience improved and with clubs starting to challenge on the regional and even continental stage, there was some hope by 2019.

The events of 2020 have put paid to much of that. Coronavirus was, and is, obviously still a major factor but there's more. Despite the lack of football, the sport still had the ability to make headlines for the wrong reasons. In September, Mohamed Atwi was killed. The 32-year-old, who had appeared for the national team and won three titles with Al Ansar, was hit in the head by a stray bullet in August.

"Pep Guardiola with the mindset of Helenio Herrera"...Al Ahed coach Bassem Marmar

Atwi had been injured while attending a funeral (there is a habit of guns being shot into the air at such ceremonies) in Beirut to mark the passing of a victim of the huge blast that ripped through the city in August to claim over 150 lives, cause injuries to thousands of others and leave many more homeless with the total damage estimated to be over $15 billion.

It shook the country. The economy has been in terrible condition for some time. The Lebanese pound has reduced in value by around 80 per cent in 2020. With just one or two games in the past 12 months, clubs have had no income.

> "We tried to get football back and it just didn't happen, then COVID-19 came and that was it"
>
> **Wael Akram Chehayeb, Lebanon FA**

"This huge thing happened in Beirut which is devastating for all of us," added Chehayeb. "It breaks your heart to see what happened and you can't imagine it. The economic situation is really bad. We are hoping that things will get better but even with all that, we still can't forget that COVID-19 is still around."

But football is back and that means there is always some hope. The new season that started on October 3 is slightly different. The financial situation had led to all foreign players being banned from the league. It will be Lebanese only. Overseas stars such as Ghana's Issah Yakubu and Tunisia's Ahmed Akaichi played a major part in Al Ahed's AFC Cup victory (this year's competition was cancelled in September) but are no longer around.

While officials are trying to put a positive spin on this, saying that it will give local youngsters much more of an opportunity, the lack of foreign players will not help the quality of the league, especially as the lack of money has meant that an increasing number of the best local players are heading overseas as well. Senior internationals such as Rabih Ataya went to Malaysia, Kassem El Zein moved to Kuwait and Mehdi Khalil headed to Iran. More are expected to follow.

"Everyone's lives have changed because of the collapse of the [Lebanese] pound and the economic situation," said Chehayeb. "Players have moved overseas due to the economic situation in the country, they are getting better deals abroad and that is a normal thing. Even if the league is not great, they want to get out of here but this gives a chance for other young talent." Looking ahead to the season, nobody is sure what is going to happen. Just to play again is a big step. At the moment, that is all anyone can focus on. "Football is the oxygen that can get us through the hard times Lebanon is going through."

Rising from the rubble...Kids playing football in the wreckage of Beirut
Photo credit: Adnan Hajj Ali, Lebanon FA

Chapecoense

Brazilian side on their way back up, four years on from tragedy

At the end of last year Chapecoense suffered their first ever relegation at national level, when their six-year spell in the Brazilian first division came to an end.

But this is a club well able to tell the difference between a sporting disappointment and a genuine tragedy. Chapecoense, of course, are the little club whose team were practically wiped out in an air disaster on November 28, 2016. Their plane crashed on approach to Medellin airport, where they were about to play Atletico Nacional in the final of the Copa Sudamericana, a Europa League equivalent. Of the 77 people on board, all but six died, including the entire coaching staff. Just three players survived – reserve goalkeeper Jakson Follman, centre back Neto and midfielder Alan Ruschel.

It was a desperately sad end to a team that had climbed from the fourth to the first division in six years – and who, extraordinarily, were the first Brazilian club to reach a continental final in over three years. They were subsequently awarded the Copa Sudamericana crown by CONMEBOL following a request by opponents Atletico Nacional.

But if it was the end of a team, it was not the end of a club.

Chapecoense made a valiant attempt to keep going. They received help from other clubs, who loaned them players, and firing on an emotional high they responded so well in 2017 that they even qualified for the Copa Libertadores, the continent's Champions League. But once the goodwill had gone and adrenalin levels returned to normal, it was obvious that this could not be sustained. The city of Chapeco, after all, has a population of little more than 225,000. It was unthinkable that such a small-town club could compete for long with the giants from Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre. There was a sense of inevitability about the relegation – but no such sense about the club's reaction. Would there be a slide back down the divisions or a rally? 2020 was set up to be an important year in the life of Chapecoense.

And they would have to fight back on a tight budget. The loss of first division status was a massive blow to the club's finances, and an extra challenge to Chapecoense's new sporting director, the air crash survivor Neto.

After his extraordinary recovery – the search for survivors was being called off when he was found – Neto eventually called time on his playing days at the end of last year. His body could take no more. "It hurts just tying my shoelaces," he confessed. The pain now comes from trying to balance the budget. Unusually, the club have had problems paying wages on time. Even so, Alan Ruschel stayed put. He had offers from other clubs, but, now operating at left-back and captaining the side, he decided to stay put. "I have history here," he said.

> But if it was the end of a team, it was not the end of a club. Chapecoense made a valiant attempt to keep going

Celebrations... Chapecoense's first state title since 2017

The other survivor from the playing staff, Jakson Follman lost part of his leg in the crash. His goalkeeping days were over. But he, too, is still connected with the club as an ambassador. And when he got married, Neto and Alan Ruschel were the best men.

Follman also won a television singing contest at the end of last year – and now Chapecoense have something to sing about.

Before the second division campaign kicked off, the club were in action at regional level. The state championships – one for each of the 27 states that make up this giant country – have lost considerable prestige in recent times. But Chapecoense's southern state of Santa Catarina is an interesting case. Most of the states are dominated by a giant capital city. Santa Catarina, though, is less centralised. Florianopolis, the coastal capital, is big without being dominant. Its two teams, Figueirense and Avai, do not have things all their own way. Either side of the capital, Joinville and Criciuma are sizeable industrial centres capable of

Survivors... Follman, Neto and Ruschel

Tragedy...The crash sent shockwaves around the world of football in 2016

Musa Juwara

The incredible rise of Africa's next big thing

supporting teams good enough to make occasional appearances in the national first division. And further inland there is Chapeco – whose local team were state champions in 1977, 1996, 2007, 2011, 2016 and 2017.

A repeat performance looked unlikely earlier this year. Chapecoense got off to a poor start, and only scraped into the knockout stages. But after the pandemic shutdown, it was clear that coach Umberto Louzer had got the balance of his team right. His side hit form at the right time, and a compact defensive unit made them very hard to score against. They kept clean sheets in both legs of the final, against surprise side Brusque, winning 2-0 at home and 1-0 away to be crowned state champions for the seventh time.

Chapecoense, then, are the kings of Santa Catarina. But this is a little club that has learned to have big ambitions. The priority now is to get back to the first division, and in the early rounds of the Serie B campaign, Louzer's men have retained their defensive meanness and made a sound start. There are new chapters to be written in the Chapecoense story. The mouse would love to roar once more.

Tim Vickery

European club football is bursting with a sudden explosion of young African talent, but few have had the dramatic journey or shown the resilience and promise of teenager Musa Juwara.

The 18-year-old from The Gambia made a sensational entrée in Serie A during lockdown at the belated end of the last season with Bologna, and much is expected from him in the new league campaign after joining Boavista on loan on transfer deadline day – even if the Portuguese club are expected to nurture his progress with patience and caution.

Plus, he will soon get a chance to go home with The Gambia national team for the resumption of the Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers after leaving the small west African nation aged just 14 and undertaking a perilous journey across the Mediterranean in a dinghy among the flood of Africans seeking economic opportunity in Europe.

Juwara was among the luckier ones, plucked from the sea by a German NGO rescue ship, but docking in Messina and sent to a reception centre for unaccompanied minors in Ruoti. It was there, kicking a ball around, that local amateur team Virtus Avigliano gave him an opportunity to play and after a while, the coach Vitantonio Summa and his wife Loredana Bruno, became his legal guardian. At the end of the 2016-17 season, Virtus Avigliano won their regional championship with the young Gambian the centre point and his reputation quickly extending beyond the south of Italy.

But there was still a legal stumbling block that had to be overcome before he could move to Chievo and play in their Primavera side. Initially the Italian federation would not let him play, citing new anti-exploitation rules for young illegal immigrants, but after a legal battle he was allowed to move, along with his adopted family to the north, where his new club also offered a chance at some education.

Juwara has not looked back since, dominating the juniors, and on the last day of Chievo's latest Serie A stay in May 2019 made an Italian top-flight debut in the latter stages of the game against Frosinone, with both clubs already relegated.

Bologna did not hesitate to sign him soon thereafter, for a reported €500,000, and he continued to bang in the goals at junior level, while being integrated into first-team training by coach Sinisa Mihajlovic. Last December he made his debut in the first team in the Coppa Italia at Udinese, and in February, just before lockdown, a brief run late in the league game at Roma.

But it was a first Serie A goal in July that thrust the teen into the worldwide spotlight, coming off the bench to equalise in Bologna's eventual 2-1 victory at third-placed Internazionale.

"It's a dream come true for me and I will remember this for the rest of my life," he told TV viewers straight after. Now more regular first-team football in Portugal's Primeira Liga and a promising international career await.

When The Gambia's Belgian coach Tom Saintfiet went to meet him in January, he was impressed by not only his talented ability but his desire too. "His speed, qualities and skills are all heightened by a sense of motivation," he said.

Juwara, ironically, is not the only refugee from The Gambia who has broken through in Italy in recent times. Ebrima Darboe, 19, has been elevated to Roma's first-team squad this season and his story will have a similar resonance when he makes his expected breakthrough, while Catania defender Kalifa Manneh has been playing in Serie C and also overcame much danger and peril to travel to Europe in an effort to live his dream.

Mark Gleeson

Bundle...Juwara is swamped by his team-mates after scoring v Inter

Italy

Local government rules clash with Serie A protocols in Napoli no-show

The new Serie A season was only three weeks old when Italian football crashed head-on into a serious COVID case, prompting no small alarm, polemics and concern about the rest of the season.

It happened on Sunday, October 4, matchday three, when Napoli launched a bombshell by failing to turn up in Turin for their away game against champions Juventus. Napoli claimed that, because two of their players had tested positive for COVID, the Campania regional health authorities (ASL) had banned them from travelling.

Two days earlier, Napoli owner, Aurelio De Laurentis, had suggested by text message to Juventus president Andrea Agnelli that maybe the game should be postponed. Juve responded by saying that they would stick to the Football Federation's COVID protocol (drawn up in June with the Ministry of Health), which stipulates that only if a club has ten positive cases can it ask for a postponement.

Thus, Juventus stuck to the rules and turned up for a game that they knew was not going to happen. The whole saga prompted two obvious immediate questions. Firstly, had Napoli really been banned by the health authorities? Secondly, would Juventus now be awarded a 3-0 "walkover", given Napoli's no-show?

This drama began on the day before the scheduled match when Napoli's Polish midfielder, Piotr Zielinski, tested positive for COVID-19, apparently prompting the Napoli team doctor, Raffaele Canonico, to check out the situation with the regional health authority, the Naples ASL. The reply was immediate: nobody who was in quarantine because they had been in contact with a COVID-positive person should travel. Thus, Napoli were banned.

Ironically, on that same Saturday, Juventus discovered that two members of their staff, not players, had also tested positive. Juve, too, contacted their local ASL, seeking advice. The Turin ASL, however, replied that under the terms of an "exemption" stipulated by the Federation-Ministry of Health protocol, Juventus could still go ahead and play.

Game off...Juventus arrived at the ground to play the game

And there's the rub, that protocol. Essentially, it provides football an exemption from the COVID rules and regulations, as they apply to the rest of Italy. Whereas the average citizen who has been in contact with a COVID-positive is required to self-isolate – and, above all, not travel around – this does not apply to footballers.

> Juventus stuck to the rules and turned up for a game that they knew was not going to happen

The protocol essentially calls for the infected players to be sent home to self-isolate, whilst the rest of the squad goes into a quarantine bubble. Those players who test negative for COVID-19 can still travel and take part in Serie A games.

According to the protocol, then, Napoli could have played the game, minus their infected players (of course (by this stage, Napoli's Eljif Elmas had also tested positive). The problem, however, is that there are special circumstances in which the infamous protocol can be overridden – for example in the case of a local lockdown or of a huge surge in the number of COVID cases in a specific region.

Thus, even though the protocol seems to be a "Get Out Of Jail" card for football, the Juventus v Napoli case proves that the card does not always work. The Napoli ASL was perfectly entitled, indeed duty bound, to intervene, if it considered the Napoli away match in Turin a health risk.

Positive...Napoli central midfielder Piotr Zielinski

Napoli had good reason to be wary. One week earlier, on Sunday September 27, the club had beaten Genoa 6-0 in Naples. On the day before that game, Genoa's goalkeeper, Mattia Perin, had tested positive for COVID. He was obviously omitted from the squad for Naples.

However, even if Perin stayed at home in Genoa, the COVID virus did not. On the day after the 6-0 drubbing in Naples, 14 Genoa players tested positive. By the end of that week, that number had risen to 22. It is at least arguable, therefore, that the Genoa cluster also infected Napoli.

Italian sports minister Vincenzo Spadafora called the entire affair a "miserable spectacle," suggesting that a postponement would have been better. Health minister Roberto Speranza sounded a critical note when he said that now was not the time to be thinking about football, rather keeping Italian schools open was more important.

Yet this incident prompts a whole series of as yet unanswered questions. When, where and why should the regional authorities intervene to effectively stop a game being played? Is the infamous protocol essentially irrelevant, given that it does not appear to have the final say?

In the wake of the debacle, both clubs came in for bitter criticism. On the one hand, some doubted Napoli's motives, suggesting that, with three key players missing (COVID victims Elmas and Zielinski as well as the injured Lorenzo Insigne), they just did not want to play.

On the other hand, Juventus were just looking for the three easy "walkover" points, said others. Naples-born politician, Luigi Iovino, who tabled a parliamentary question about the non-game, took that line, saying:

"Health comes before everything. Juventus should not try to exploit a health crisis. The game should have been postponed because there simply were not the basic health requirements for the staging of a match."

With the federation still due to rule on the mishap at the time of writing, this story may well run and run.

Paddy Agnew

Frank de Boer

New Netherlands coach has a lot to prove

"In front of you is sitting a very happy person", said Frank de Boer at the press conference for his appointment as the Netherlands' national coach. "Even though you can't always say that about me."

He was referring to his often-surly facial expression, but his remarks also summarised the divided reaction to his appointment. Relief and happiness from the De Boer camp and at the Dutch FA, but vexation throughout the rest of the country.

Although he represented the *Oranje* 112 times, making him the third-most capped player (behind Wesley Sneijder and Edwin van der Sar), De Boer was not the obvious choice to succeed Ronald Koeman. His track record in recent years has been too poor.

The Dutch FA had a serious problem when Koeman failed to resist the lure of Barcelona. His contract contained a clause that meant he could leave for his former club if it ever came knocking. So when the Catalan giants considered him the best option to succeed the sacked Quique Setien, there was nothing the Dutch FA could do to change his mind.

But what next? The squad was happy to continue with assistant coach Dwight Lodeweges. And the Canadian-born Lodeweges, whose parents migrated after World War II, was coach during the Nations League matches against Poland and Italy. However, he did not convince, failing to have an answer to the constant Italian attacks in a 1-0 defeat in Amsterdam. And, after coaching unfashionable clubs such as Cambuur, PEC Zwolle and amateur club VVOG, he was never seen as the ideal representative of the national team but more as the perfect assistant.

The federation turned to former coach Frank Rijkaard, who has been out of football for many years, and Peter Bosz, who recently renewed his contract at Bayer Leverkusen. Both turned it down.

Then the name of Louis van Gaal was mentioned as caretaker until the European Championship. The former Manchester United manager, who led Netherlands to third spot at the 2014 World Cup, seemed to be interested. However, the squad, as skipper and spokesman Virgil van Dijk made clear in veiled terms, wasn't particularly keen. Neither was the Dutch FA, fearing that Van Gaal would turn everything that had been built in recent years upside down, both on and off the pitch.

So finally candidate number four, Frank de Boer, had the approval of the board and the team, but others remain unconvinced – an opinion based on his three managerial spells abroad. His reign at Internazionale lasted only 85 days, at Crystal Palace just ten weeks and at Atlanta United a year and a half. He was sacked by each club.

This is in stark contrast to the start of his career. De Boer was Bert van Marwijk's assistant when Netherlands got to the 2010 World Cup final and, once standing on his own two feet, led his boyhood club Ajax to four consecutive Eredivisie titles.

The time seemed right to go abroad, but the 50-year-old never found the perfect match. Jose Mourinho even labelled him the "worst manager in the history of the Premier League".

However, he isn't the only one to blame. At Inter he was confronted with mutinous players who disagreed with the board, while in London he was asked to renovate the Crystal Palace team – who then panicked when results were poor. Perhaps De Boer is better off at home. If he can relaunch his career with national team success and rediscover the magic of his early managerial spell, he won't be the only happy person in the Netherlands.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Appointment... Netherlands' new coach De Boer holds his iconic No.4 shirt

HAPPY DAVIES

Alphonso Davies – aka Phonzie – is having the time of his life after rising from a refugee camp to Champions League winner

Words: Nick Bidwell

The Canadian city of Edmonton, where Bayern Munich's increasingly impressive roadrunner left-back Alphonso Davies spent his formative years, is not the sort of place where eagle-eyed European club scouts normally prospect for round ball excellence.

As far as the vast majority of the Edmonton populace is concerned, ice hockey is the only sport to raise the pulse. In these parts, the stick and the puck are nothing less than a religion, with fans dedicated to their beloved Edmonton Oilers, who in the 1980s won a string of Stanley Cups (the Holy Grail of the National Hockey League) and featured the inimitable skills of Wayne Gretzky, almost unanimously considered the greatest player of all time.

Growing up in Edmonton, young Alphonso – nicknamed Phonzie – was to all intents and purposes a million miles from the professional football mainstream. But what an expert navigator he has proven to be, successfully going from the "Free Footie" programme in his hometown – an afterschool indoor league for disadvantaged inner city kids – to the heady heights of a clean sweep (Champions League, Bundesliga and DFB Cup) with Bayern last term.

Only one full season as a Bayern starter and already elevated to the rank of superstar. Not bad for a teenager who was born and raised in a refugee camp in Ghana. His rocketing market worth tells its own story: 18 months after Bayern paid Vancouver Whitecaps €11.5 million, he now would command a fee seven or eight times that amount.

It is incredible just how quick his ascent has been. At the start of last season, he was still playing for Bayern's reserves in the German third tier. In December 2019, *Kicker* magazine rated him the tenth-best full-back in the country. What a difference a few months make – now he tops the charts.

Luck has been on his side too. Without the long-term injuries to Bayern centre-backs Niklas Sule and Lucas Hernandez, which resulted in the Austrian ace David Alaba sliding across from left to centre-back, Davies may still be on the sidelines. Destiny invariably needs a helping hand.

While Davies has a long way to go to emulate the gold-encrusted longevity of "Gretzky The Great One," there is undoubtedly something very special about the teenager. Like Gretzky in his heyday, Alphonso plays the game with a twinkle in his eye. He does not perform for the pay cheques or even for the

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Alphonso

Fresh faced... Celebrating his first MLS goal

glory. Football is total fun for him. Even in the tensest of moments, he always seems to be enjoying himself, operating with inexhaustible, almost childlike enthusiasm.

He does not solely gets his kicks from the offensive part of his duties: the explosive forward runs, mesmerising dribbling routines and sheer creative persistence. Since Bayern switched him from a flying winger to full-back in the spring of 2019, he clearly derives as much pleasure from defending. Whether covering, tackling or making a last-ditch block, he puts his heart and soul into it.

His mentality is exactly what Bayern tend to look for in a player. Immune to complacency, committed to the core and always prepared to go those extra miles for the win. Add in his dexterity on the ball and impressive physique, you have the full package. Even before he nailed a down a permanent spot in the Bayern first team, club director of sport Hasan Salihamidzic was singling him out as one to watch: "Phonzie is a machine. We like him because there's no vanity in his game. He simply does what he has to do."

Salihamidzic's work as Bayern's head of recruitment has not always met the universal approval of fans and local media. But he undeniably got his sums right when bringing in Davies, beating the likes of Manchester United, PSG and Barcelona to the tyro's signature. As usual, Bayern did their homework, offering the most comprehensive and persuasive career plan.

Whereas successive Bayern coaches, Niko Kovac and Hansi Flick deserve much credit for successfully using him as a raiding left-back, it has to be noted that Davies was anything but inexperienced in that role. He had played there several times for Vancouver Whitecaps, frequently lined up as such for Canada and took up the same position in the 2018 MLS All-Star game against Juventus.

Canada's English-born coach John Herdman believes he and his staff should take some of the credit for Davies' development into a stunning left-back: "We started that process," he recently explained on the Canadian football podcast *A Kick in the Grass*. "Against certain types of teams who sit deep, Phonzie can provide us with great support from deep positions. He's probably played 60 per cent of his national team games as a full-back."

Alphonso's attitude to the game is as simple and unvarnished as it was when he was a kid. Essentially, he is the same footballer-athlete that he always was, relishing the chance to prove himself in one-on-ones.

He loves to impose himself in such duels. It's a primal instinct with him, an urge he showcased at all his Canadian staging posts: at school in Edmonton, on the Free Footie programme, in his early teens in the blue-and-white stripes of the Edmonton Strikers, then as a boy wonder in MLS with the Whitecaps.

Only one full season as a Bayern starter and already elevated to the rank of superstar. Not bad for a teenager who was born and raised in a refugee camp in Ghana

From the earliest of ages, it was as clear as day he was born to be a sportsman. Tim Adams, the former Canadian Broadcasting Corporation journalist who set up Free Footie, says he was instantly bowled over by Alphonso's rare mix of technique, agility and intelligence, that even at the tender age of 11, he radiated huge amounts of promise.

Melissa Guzzo, his gym teacher at the Mother Teresa School, noticed his aptitude for games too, as well as his upbeat bubbly personality. "Our little Alphonso was one of those kids with a permanent smile on his face, he was always dancing in the hallways," she told

International hero... Starring for Canada

Canadian Press reporter, Colette Derworiz. "He was such a natural talent. Anything he touched – track, basketball, any sport – he was the kid."

His prowess as an all-round sportsman has certainly played a key role in his development into a stellar footballer. His trademark stop-start dribbling manoeuvres, for example, are straight off the basketball court. The best example? His outstanding solo slalom that ended with Joshua Kimmich tapping home in Bayern's 8-2 drubbing of Barcelona in a Champions League quarter-final last season; an assist that was arguably the highlight of an unforgettable evening.

In the same way, his 100-metre sprinter speed gives him an edge that few can counter. Not only can he power forward, but he also has the means to swiftly recover his position – a living, breathing insurance policy for Bayern. Nick Huoseh, who prior to becoming his agent, coached him at Edmonton Strikers, says he always had the ability to burn rubber.

"He was like a gazelle," Huoseh told Neil Davidson at *Canadian Press*. "He would just take off and you can't catch him."

Another key figure in the Davies fairy tale was Marco Bossio, his coach at St. Nicholas Soccer Academy in Edmonton. Bossio had him under his wing for three years at St. Nick's (from the age of 11 to 14) and successfully added to the youngster's skill-set, with his weaker right foot and leadership qualities

Record-breaker...Davies became the CONCACAF Gold Cup's youngest-ever goalscorer in 2017

Shooting...Canada reached the quarter-finals at last year's CONCACAF Gold Cup

Speed merchant... Davies flying up the wing for Bayern

coming in for particular attention. Bossio also was instrumental in Davies' switch to the Vancouver Whitecaps academy at the age of 14, setting the recruitment ball rolling with a phone call to technical director Craig Dalrymple.

Naturally the Whitecaps would not just take Bossio at his word. They insisted on checking and double-checking, twice inviting Alphonso to Vancouver for trials and travelling to Edmonton on several occasions to watch him in action. They even arranged for Davies to attend a Canadian Soccer Under-15 camp, where they would subject him to further scrutiny.

After jumping through every hoop put in front of him, he finally was accepted, only for his mother Victoria to voice her doubts. She thought he was too young to fly the family nest, too raw to begin a new life 720 miles away from home. Alphonso, however, managed to talk her round, promising to make her proud. As a compromise, the Whitecaps and the Davies family agreed to let him finish the school year in Edmonton and move to Vancouver in August 2015.

He would not take long to spark into life at his new place of work. Almost as soon as he arrived, rumours began to circulate that that he already had the tools to compete in MLS. Certain grizzled characters in the media thought it was all hype. Not so. By early 2016, 'Caps head coach Carl Robinson was regularly deploying him

Timeline

APR 3, 2016
Makes his professional debut for Whitecaps II in the United Soccer League Championship, aged 15.

MAY 15, 2016
Becomes the youngest goalscorer in USL history, aged 15 years and six months, after netting against LA Galaxy II.

JUL 17, 2016
Having been promoted to the Vancouver Whitecaps first team, Davies makes his MLS debut v Orlando City.

JUN 6, 2017
Receives Canadian citizenship and is immediately called into the squad for a friendly v Curacao, becoming Canada's youngest debutant.

JUL 8, 2017
Scores against French Guiana to become the youngest goalscorer in the history of both Canada and the Gold Cup.

on the wing in pre-season friendlies and he was only 15 when making his first senior start for the club, a Canadian Championship semi-final victory over Ottawa Fury.

Carl Robinson, especially appreciative of the youngster's matchday instincts, had absolute faith in Davies, no matter the date on his birth certificate. Robinson would throw him in at the deep end without hesitation, handing him his MLS debut aged 15 years and eight months, and including him in the starting line-up for a vital CONCACAF Champions League semi-final with Mexican outfit Tigres UANL less than a year later.

His numbers in his three-and-a-half years with the Whitecaps (12 goals and 14 assists in 81 competitive first-team games) might not have been barnburner material. But he was precocious, he dazzled and he thrilled. What's more, he turned into a one-man record-breaker, emerging as the youngest goalscorer in the history of the Whitecaps, the CONCACAF Champions League and Canadian Championship. There was simply no stopping him.

"My grandmother could have picked him out," smiled Craig Dalrymple in an interview with *The Province* in October 2018, the month he appeared in his last game for the 'Caps. "It wasn't a case of us being great scouts. At first, we thought it was too early to relocate him from another province. His parents weren't ready, he wasn't ready. So we tracked him. When his parents were satisfied we could take care of him from an educational and social perspective, he made the move. Then he hit the ground running."

Davies, the first full Canada international to win a Champions League now finds himself cast as Canadian football's poster boy

Davies, the first full Canada international to win a Champions League, now finds himself cast as Canadian football's poster boy, someone for Canuck kids to look up to and take inspiration from. Ice hockey indubitably is king in Canada and always will remain so. But suddenly soccer has a chance to dramatically extend its reach in Canada, and Phonzie has all the ingredients to be the ideal recruiting sergeant: the high-profile, the achievements, the jet-heeled playing style; his modest, cheery demeanour and last but by no means least, a most compelling of back stories.

Alphonso was born 20 years ago in a refugee camp in Buduburam in southern Ghana. His parents, father Debeah and mother Victoria, had fled there to escape the civil war raging in their native Liberia and for the first five years of his life, the sprawling United Nations compound was his world. It was the toughest of existences. With a corrugated iron shack for a home and a short supply of food and clean water, while the stench of death hung in the air.

All was to change for the family in 2005. Their application to resettle in Canada was accepted and they duly crossed the Atlantic for a better tomorrow, initially moving on a temporary basis to Windsor, Ontario, then putting down some real roots in Edmonton, 2,000 miles to the west. With his mum and dad both working long hours of shift work, Alphonso had to step into the breach. Besides his schoolwork, he often had to take care of his younger siblings and there were plenty of other household chores to do. He had to grow up – and fast.

Talal Al Awaid, a former youth team coach of his at Edmonton Strikers, describes a young man with extraordinary levels of maturity, self-sacrifice and ambition. "He was a kid who saw the struggles his parents had to go through and who obviously had his own struggles," Al Awaid

Next generation... Jonathan David and Jonathan Osorio celebrate a Canadian goal with Davies

Champions League...Robert Lewandowski and David Alaba celebrate beating Chelsea with Davies

MAR 5, 2018
Scores his first MLS goal in the opening game of the 2018 season against Montreal Impact.

JUL 25, 2018
Vancouver Whitecaps announce that Davies will join Bayern Munich at the end of the 2018 season.

OCT 28, 2018
Signs off his MLS career by scoring twice for the Whitecaps in a 2-1 victory over Portland Timbers.

JAN 27, 2019
Makes his Bundesliga debut after coming off the bench in a 3-1 victory over Stuttgart.

explained to *Canadian Press*. "As a nine and ten-year-old he had to change the nappies of a brother and sister because his parents were working. Those are true stories. It lights a different kind of fire in a person. They are driven to succeed and to make sure their family are taken care of.

"When he was 12, 13 or 14, you could have a conversation with him and not feel you were speaking to a kid. He understood that actions have consequences. He understood that in order to be successful, he had to make a commitment to certain things."

The benefits of this early plunge into adulthood were there for all to see on his introduction to senior national team football in the summer of 2017, shortly after being granted Canadian citizenship. Just 16 when he won his first full cap as a substitute in a friendly victory over Curacao – thus becoming the youngest-ever player to represent the country –

Winner...Davies poses with the Champions League trophy after victory v PSG in August

he took all the media razzmatazz in his stride. The youngster was all business. "You just go out there, play your game and don't think about it too much," he said afterwards.

At the CONCACAF Gold Cup, the following month, he pulled out all the stops, operating with verve, guile and power on either wing and scoring three times. He would leave the tournament with a clutch of goodies: the Golden Boot, Best Young Player award, and a spot in the Team of the Tournament.

Although eligible to play for both Liberia and Ghana, he insists, he was only ever interested in representing the Maple Leaf. "Ever since I was little, Canada has been my home," he declared in a chat with magazine *Macleans*. "I've lived here for a long time. My parents love it, I love it. It's the country that took me in, that made me the man I am today."

Canada has every reason to revere Phonzie, proof that the dispossessed can find a place in the sun. In these troubled times, he is a beacon of hope.

Canucks star... Davies fired Canada to an historic win over USA last year

> "Ever since I was little, Canada has been my home...I love it"

MAR 17, 2019
Becomes the first Canada international to score for Bayern, rounding off a 6–0 thrashing of Mainz.

OCT 16, 2019
Scores the opening goal as Canada beat USA 2-0 – their first victory over the Stars and Stripes in 34 years.

OCT 26, 2019
On his first Bundesliga start, plays 90 minutes at left-back in a 2-1 victory over Union Berlin.

AUG 23, 2020
Starts the Champions League final, becoming the first Canada international to win the competition.

SEP 24, 2020
Adds another trophy to his collection, coming on as a substitute in the UEFA Super Cup win against Sevilla.

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ALPHONSO DAVIES

"Bayern have already helped me achieve many of my dreams… But I'm just getting started"

The lightning-quick Bayern Munich and Canada star tells *World Soccer* all about his career so far

What's your earliest football memory – did you start playing when you moved to Canada, or before that?
It was in Canada that I first really started playing. There was a programme that allowed kids from the city to play football after school and I didn't ever miss a session. Football is growing [in Canada], but it isn't the most popular sport. For me it was all I ever wanted to play though, and there is the chance to develop in Canada.

You're an established player in the national team, and part of an exciting new generation. Do you think Canada can reach their first World Cup?
It has been so long but I really do believe in the qualities of this team and I can see us putting up a real fight for a place at the 2022 World Cup. It would be an incredible moment, not just for the team, but for the country as a whole.

Did you ever consider playing for Ghana or Liberia?
I am proud of my heritage and the heritage of my parents, but I was just five years old when I moved to Canada. It has been my home for so long and it was where I grew up, so those were the reasons behind my decision.

Do you think that there is more talent like yours in MLS? Do you believe it gets the respect it deserves as a league?
There will be more talent for sure, and I hope that young players coming through can see that playing for the big teams in Europe doesn't just have to be a dream.

Was it always an ambition of yours to play in Europe? Did you have any other offers before choosing Bayern Munich?
Europe is always the ambition for any professional I think, because of the standard. I think that there were conversations with one or two other clubs, but Bayern was an easy choice and the right choice.

Which senior players helped you to settle in when you arrived in Munich, who did you look to learn from and who are your friends at the club?
All of the players and coaches were so helpful to me, but David Alaba has been a big help. He was one of the best left-backs in the world and now he is one of the best centre-backs in the world. I have tried to learn all I can off him because there is so much he has to teach. ➤

adidas
19

Dream come true...Davies poses with the Champions League trophy alongside team-mate Joshua Zirkzee

You arrived at Bayern as a winger but have established yourself as first choice at left-back – was that a difficult transition? What do you think will be your best position long term?
Switching from left-winger to left-back was not as difficult as you might imagine because I have played there many times before for the national team and also for the Vancouver Whitecaps. The Bundesliga is of course a higher level, and even though I am happy with my performances I want to learn more about the position.

Do you look at somebody like Gareth Bale, who made his name as a left-back before being pushed forward – so almost a role reversal to what you've experienced?
Gareth Bale is an absolutely fantastic player who has achieved so much and won many

Hero...Davies came face-to-face with Messi in Lisbon

"I am grateful for my pace. I am new to playing left-back so when I get caught out of position I can use my pace to make up for it"

World Cup dreams... Last year's Gold Cup

trophies. I don't compare, though – if the coach asks me to play at left-back that's where I play, and if he asks me to play on the left wing that's where I play.

In June against Werder Bremen, you set a new Bundesliga speed record, running at over 36 kilometres per hour. Do you believe you're the quickest footballer in Europe?
Maybe! I am grateful for my pace. I am new to playing left-back so when I get caught out of position I can use my pace to make up for it. I am happy to have pace, but as I grow I want to focus more on my positioning and learning rather than just thinking I can rely on my pace. Pace has always been a part of my game; I knew I had it very early on playing at school and I've always been pleased to have it.

You said that Lionel Messi didn't want to swap shirts after your Champions League semi-final victory against Barcelona – what was it like playing against him?
He was upset. I understand that – nobody wants to exit the Champions League when you are so close to the final. For me, Messi was an idol while I was growing up in Canada, so to play against him was a dream come true.

In your first season as a first-team regular at Bayern, you've played a key part in a treble-winning team – has that sunk in yet?
Sometimes I think about it and can't believe that it is all happening, but the reality is that I have to be focused. We want to fight for all the trophies this season, I want to improve, I want to get better. There is no time to think about the success of last season.

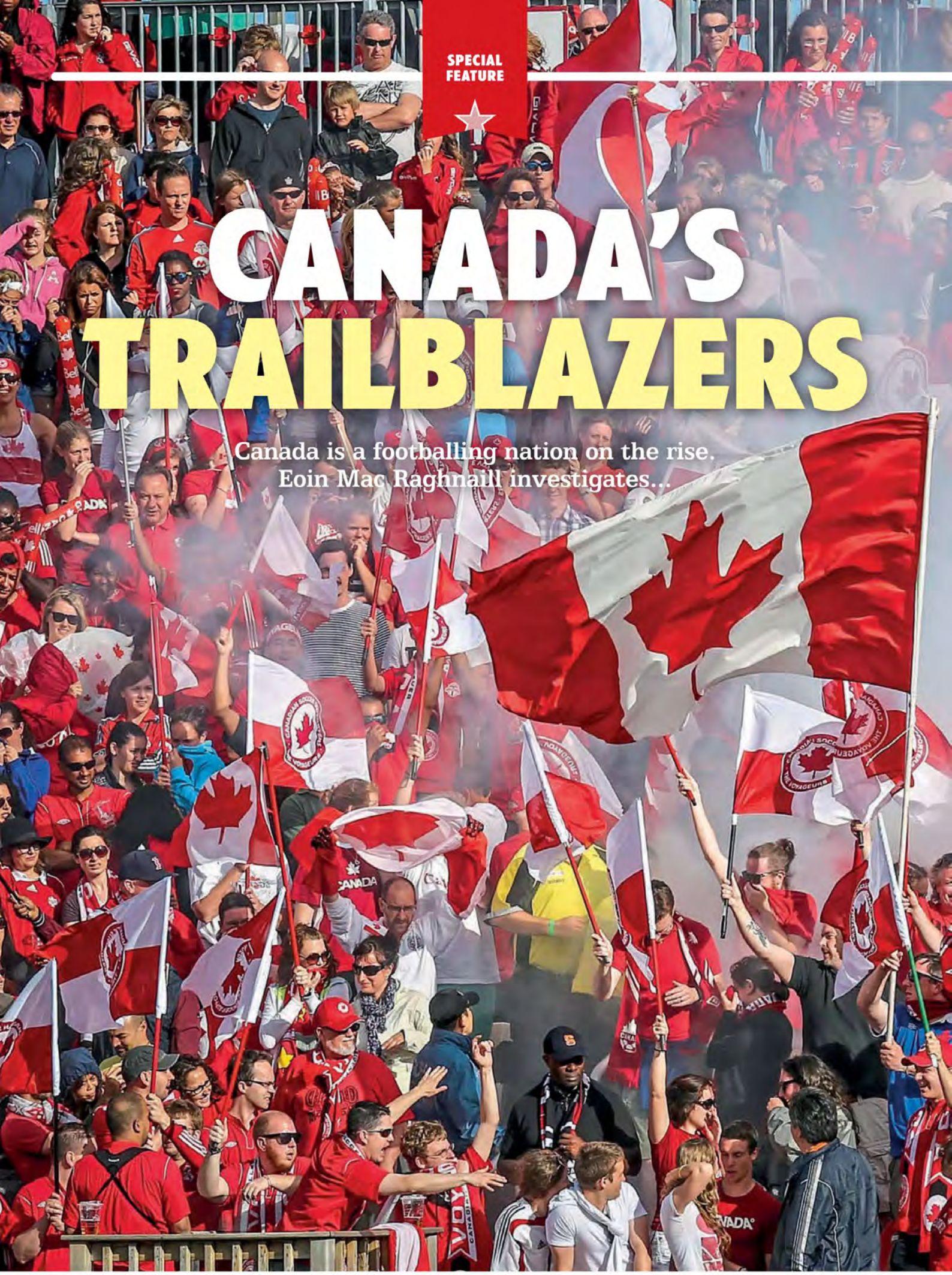
What was going through your mind that night in August after you'd won the Champions League?
It sounds like a cliché, I know, but it was a dream come true. As a kid playing football in Canada you dream of playing for one of the big teams in Europe and winning the Champions League. That night in Lisbon one of my dreams did come true.

What are your objectives for the future? Do you see yourself at Bayern for a long time or would you like to sample different leagues?
I want to stay in Germany and with Bayern for as long as possible. I arrived in Europe with so many dreams and already Bayern have helped me achieve many of them. But I am just getting started – there will be many more.

You've spoken about wanting to be an actor in the future. It must help that you're already TikTok famous?
It is a dream! I think it would be a lot of fun, but before that I hope I have many more years of football left to play. During the restrictions I obviously had a lot more time to make the videos. It's important to me that fans get to see a bit of my personality. I like to have fun and spread some joy, so yes, I am sure there will be more.

Interview by Donald Deane

TikTok... Davies' videos have gone viral



CANADA'S TRAILBLAZERS

Canada is a footballing nation on the rise. Eoin Mac Raghnaill investigates...

On top of the sensational emergence of Alphonso Davies, his fellow countryman Jonathan David commanded a €30 million transfer by moving from Gent to Lille earlier this summer. There are high hopes for Liverpool's Liam Millar too, while 18-year-old Jayden Nelson has already made his senior international debut and played in MLS for Toronto.

Equally, Canadian women's football has progressed rapidly of late as well – epitomised by Lyon defender Kadeisha Buchanan lifting her fourth Champions League trophy in a row following a 3-1 victory over Wolfsburg back in August. Lyon's semi-final opponents, Paris Saint-Germain, have the next big thing on their books in the form of 19-year-old striker Jordyn Huitema – who also happens to be Davies' girlfriend.

The Canucks have long been considered a fledgling football nation. It seems that label is now set to become out of date.

With the future looking bright for the Canadian women and men's teams, we focus on the the Canadian trailblazers who have paved the way.

THE PIONEERS

Canadian football has a deeper and more illustrious history than is often assumed. In 1888 a team from the Western Football Association of Ontario toured Britain, becoming the first international team to do so, and featuring some of the earliest examples of Canadians who crossed the Atlantic in the pursuit of glory.

Edward Hagarty Parry

More than a century before Canadian-born England international midfielder Owen Hargreaves, there was the pioneering Edward Parry.

The Toronto native moved to England at a young age, and captained the Oxford University team that lost the 1877 FA Cup final – a 2-1 defeat at the hands of south-east London club, Wanderers. In 1881 Parry had another crack at FA Cup glory, this time captaining Old Carthusians to a 3-0 victory over Old Etonians.

In doing so, he became both the first Canadian to win an FA Cup, and the first non-UK player to captain an FA Cup-winning team.

A natural-born leader known for his mazy dribbling, Parry ended his career with three England caps.

Walter Wells Bowman

Likely the first Canadian-born footballer to have played in the English Football League, Bowman played for Accrington

(pre-Stanley) and Manchester City between 1892 and 1899.

As part of a Canada side, he toured Britain in 1891, but decided to remain in England after the rest of the squad had returned to North America.

He signed with Lancashire side Accrington, and a year later joined Manchester club, Ardwick, who would later go bankrupt and reform in 1894 as Manchester City. Bowman, who played in the outside right position, made a total of 47 appearances and scored three goals for the two clubs.

Joe Kennaway

Originally from Point St. Charles, Montreal, Kennaway was a dual international who played for both Canada and Scotland between 1926 and 1933.

Regarded as one of the best goalkeepers of his generation, Kennaway crossed the pond in 1931 to join Celtic – where he won two league championships and three Scottish FA Cups.

In 1926 Kennaway appeared for Canada against the United States, but also featured once for Scotland, versus Austria in 1933 at Hampden Park. On retiring, he coached at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

THE INVADERS

In the 1980s and 1990s football became more globalised, and Europe saw an influx of Canadian talent like never before. Transfer policies at clubs became more unfettered and scouting networks were expanded further afield in search of hidden gems.

Craig Forrest

Ipswich Town invited Forrest to Europe in 1985, joining his compatriot Frank Yallop who had arrived two years earlier. The goalkeeper cemented his place in the side, and played a massive role in the club's 1992 promotion and subsequent entry into the inaugural Premier League season.

Forrest thus became the first Canadian to play in the Premier League, when he started in the opening day 1-1 draw with Aston Villa. His other record is less welcome: in 1995 he was in goal for the league's joint-worst defeat, a 9-0 loss to Manchester United.

After spells at Chelsea and then West Ham, Forrest retired in 2002 with 56 Canada caps to his name, and was inducted into their Hall of Fame in 2007. He was also named in the country's all-time XI, and was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame in 2015.

Craig Forrest... The Premier League original

Owen Hargreaves... Playing for England

> For this current generation of exciting Canadian players, Owen Hargreaves is the benchmark

Carrie Serwetnyk

Born in Hamilton, Ontario, Serwetnyk played for Canada from 1986 to 1996, and was one of the first women to move abroad in search of greener pastures.

From 1988 to 1990 she played for French side AS Poissy, before making a move to Japan in 1992, enjoying spells with Fujita SC Mercury and then Yomiuri Nippon SC.

In 1996 Serwetnyk returned to North America, resuming her career with the national team. Upon retirement she founded the non-profit organisation Equal Play and also became the first female inductee into the Canadian Soccer Hall of Fame. Her career helped pave the way for the next generation, including Christine Sinclair – both the most-capped and highest-scoring footballer of all time.

Owen Hargreaves

Hargreaves is easily the most familiar name on this list, yet not a Canadian international.

Born in Calgary, Alberta, Hargreaves joined Bayern Munich at the age of 16. Three years later he made his league debut and quickly established himself as a first-team regular.

Born to an English father and Welsh mother, Hargreaves – much to the dismay of Canuck fans – chose to play for Wales at U19 level, before switching to England U21s in 2000. He received his first senior cap in 2001, becoming the only player to have played for England without having previously lived in the UK. He ended his career with 42 caps, and appeared at Euro 2004 and the 2006 World Cup.

For this current generation of exciting Canadian players, Owen Hargreaves is the benchmark. The first Canadian to win a major European title, he won four Bundesliga crowns and a Champions League at Bayern Munich, then helped Manchester United win the Premier League and Champions League in 2008.

Charmaine Hooper

The epitome of a trailblazer in the Canadian women's game, Hooper was an outstanding talent who was inducted into the Canadian Soccer Hall of Fame in June 2012.

Born in Georgetown, Guyana, Hooper

immigrated to Canada via Zambia at the age of nine. In 1993, having been spotted playing for North Carolina State University, she moved to Norway, joining Toppserien side FK Donn. A brief spell at Lazio followed, before another high-profile move to Japanese side Prima Ham FC Kunoichi in 1994.

Having won basically every accolade on offer in Japan, she returned to North America in 1995, and represented Canada at three World Cups. She called time on her glittering career in 2008 with 129 caps.

Charmaine Hooper... Women trailblazer

Jonathan de Guzman... Representing Netherlands

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The turn of the millennium saw another crop of Canadian stars surface at larger and more prestigious club across Europe. With increasingly younger Canadians being snapped up by top European academies, the calibre of player being produced was taken to a whole new level.

Tomasz Radzinski

An energetic and clinical striker, Polish-born Radzinski moved to Canada with his family in 1990, beginning his career with the North York Rockets in the Canadian Soccer League.

Radzinski returned to Europe with Belgian side Germinal Ekeren, before joining giants Anderlecht in 1998. He was top scorer in 2000-01, putting in some electrifying performances, most notably in Europe where he scored a brace in Anderlecht's famous 2-1 win over Manchester United.

A move to Everton followed in 2001, where he became a big fan favourite, notching up 25 Premier League goals in 91 appearances over three seasons, before three years at Fulham. He is still the Premier League's top-scoring Canadian, and in 2018 was inducted into the Canadian Soccer Hall of Fame.

Julian de Guzman

Marseille scouts spotted the elder of the De Guzman brothers at an early age, bringing him to Europe in 1997.

Tomasz Radzinski... In Canadian colours

His first taste of senior football came in Germany, first with Saarbrucken and then Hannover, before a headline-grabbing transfer to Deportivo La Coruna in 2005 – making him the first Canadian to play in La Liga.

De Guzman was a massive hit in Spain, and was voted Deportivo Player of the Year in 2007-08. After his contract expired in 2009, he returned to North America with Toronto FC.

Widely considered one of Canada's greatest footballing exports, he retired in 2016 with 89 international caps to his name.

Jonathan de Guzman

Two years after his older brother had left for Marseille, Jonathan followed in his footsteps, joining Feyenoord's academy in 1999. By 2005, he had become a regular in the first team, notching up 109 league appearances.

So well established was De Guzman, that he eventually became a naturalised Dutchmen during his time at Feyenoord. Though born in Canada to Jamaican and Filipino parents, De Guzman lined up for the *Oranje* 14 times.

Spells in La Liga at Mallorca and Villarreal followed his time in Rotterdam, before two years on loan at Swansea City for two consecutive seasons between 2012-2014.

The free-kick expert was a massively influential figure at the heart of the Swans' midfield, so much so that Italian giants Napoli came calling, with De Guzman moving there in 2014.

He was last seen back in Germany with Eintracht Frankfurt, and is currently a free agent after his contract expired in the summer.

Atiba Hutchinson

The Besiktas midfielder is the definition of a stalwart.

Born in Ontario to Trinidadian parents, Hutchinson began his career with Canadian Soccer League team York Region Shooters in 2002, but made his name in Sweden – first with Osters IF, then Helsingborg.

His form impressed Danish Champions League qualifiers FC Copenhagen, and over the course of his four years in Denmark he was linked with a number of Premier League clubs, before eventually joining Dutch giants PSV in 2010.

He became a regular starter there too, winning the KNVB Cup in 2012. In 2013 he made the move to Turkish side Besiktas where he has made over 200 appearances across seven seasons.

One of the most decorated Canadian internationals with 84 caps to his name, Hutchinson was also named in the all-time Canada XI in 2012.

Radzinski... Celebrating for Everton

Julian de Guzman... The older brother

Atiba Hutchinson... Still going strong

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

[MLS EXPORTS]

Words Jamie Evans

Jack HARRISON

Leeds United

In a sentence
Former MLS SuperDraft #1 pick that scored Leeds United's first Premier League goal for 16 years.

What they say
"He has something important that only a few players have – when he has the ball at his feet, you get the sensation something special is going to happen."
Former New York City FC team-mate, David Villa

"I think there are a lot of big things to come from Jack. I like him, he's a great lad, great ability."
Chelsea manager and former New York City FC team-mate, Frank Lampard

The story so far
As far as English players go, Harrison's route to the Premier League has been unique.

Disillusioned by her son's experience in the academies of first Liverpool and then Manchester United, Jack's mother Debbie enrolled him in Berkshire School, Massachusetts, with the then 14-year-old's football ability earning him a full scholarship. The move worked out perfectly and, within a few years, Harrison was lining up alongside Frank Lampard, David Villa and Andrea Pirlo for New York City FC.

Ten goals in the 2017 season earned him a move to NYCFC's sister-club Manchester City, and for the last three seasons he has been on loan in the Championship, first with Middlesbrough and more recently with Leeds.

Last season he played every match as Marcelo Bielsa's side finished top of the Championship, and the transfer window saw him agree to a third consecutive season at Elland Road. He showed his class on his first Premier League game by scoring an expertly taken finish at Anfield.

3 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HARRISON

- Harrison was actually picked by Chicago Fire in the MLS SuperDraft, but within 30 minutes had been traded to New York City FC.
- He played alongside Marcus Rashford in Manchester United's academy before moving to America.
- The ex-England U21 international once said he'd have been a cricketer if he hadn't made it as a footballer.

> "When he has the ball at his feet, you get the sensation something special is going to happen"
> David Villa, Former New York City FC team-mate

The next step
As a huge fan of Bielsa, Pep Guardiola believes that Harrison is learning his trade at the perfect club. If the winger's progress continues, he has every chance of competing for a place in City's attack next season.

Strengths
Harrison has quick feet and a dangerous left foot, but also does everything that Bielsa expects of his forwards without the ball – only six wingers made more tackles in the Championship last season.

Weaknesses
In last season's Championship, Harrison took 78 shots, including 51 inside the penalty area, yet only scored six times – that's an average of 13 shots per goal. The clinical streak he showed at Anfield must become a regular feature of his game.

Tyler ADAMS

RB Leipzig
Adams' successful transition from New York Red Bulls to the Bundesliga has made him something of a poster boy for MLS, proving that the league's best talents can step up. It was his introduction that turned the Champions League quarter-final against Atletico Madrid: first by curbing Joao Felix's influence on the game, then by scoring the winner.

Chris RICHARDS

Bayern Munich
The German champions brought Richards to Munich in 2018 as part of their partnership with FC Dallas, and handed him his Bundesliga debut at the end of last season. The USA U23 centre-back is hoping to emulate the impact of Alphonso Davies by establishing himself in the Bayern defence.

Erik PALMER-BROWN

Austria Vienna
The centre-back caught the eye of European scouts when he made his Sporting Kansas City debut aged 17 in 2014. Juventus reportedly made an offer before he spent a year on loan at Porto, then joined current club Manchester City in 2018. Now 23, he is hoping for a breakthrough in his second season on loan in Austria.

Zack STEFFEN

Manchester City
Work permit issues denied Steffen a transfer to Championship side Bristol City in 2018, and within a year he had joined Manchester City instead. After spending 2019-20 in Germany with Fortuna Dusseldorf, the USA No.1 is back at the Etihad to replace Claudio Bravo as City's reserve keeper.

Cyle LARIN

Besiktas
The striker was named MLS Rookie of the Year after scoring 17 goals for Orlando City in 2015. In 2018 he left for Turkey, where his form has been mixed. After four goals in his first four games, he struggled in 2018-19 and spent last season on loan at Zulte Waregem, scoring seven goals and assisting five to help the Belgians to a respectable mid-table finish. The early signs are that he has taken that form back to his parent club.

Reggie CANNON

Boavista
With Cannon competing with ex-Ajax academy graduate Sergino Dest and Newcastle United's DeAndre Yedlin, USA are not short of athletic, attack-minded right-backs. The 22-year-old has been an MLS regular for FC Dallas over the last three years, before moving to Portugal in September.

Alberth ELIS

Boavista
Shortly after capturing Cannon, Boavista completed a Texas double signing by adding Elis from Houston Dynamo, creating a right flank of unrivalled pace, energy and trickery. Nicknamed *La Pantera* (The Panther), Elis has been a tormenter of MLS defences since 2017, with a direct hand in 56 goals in 90 matches. He also has a good goal record at international level, with 10 in 42 appearances for Honduras.

Ulysses LLANEZ

Heerenveen
It is a sign of Llanez's confidence that when USA won a penalty on his senior international debut, the then 18-year-old grabbed the ball and calmly slotted home. The LA Galaxy graduate made a name for himself with seven goals in the U20 CONCACAF Championship win in 2018, then joined Wolfsburg. The tricky winger is now on loan at Dutch outfit Heereneveen.

Champions League fixtures

Holders...Bayern begin the defence of their trophy at home to Atletico Madrid

GROUP A

21 OCT	RB Salzburg **v** Lokomotiv Moscow
21 OCT	Bayern Munich **v** Atletico Madrid
27 OCT	Lokomotiv Moscow **v** Bayern Munich
27 OCT	Atletico Madrid **v** RB Salzburg
3 NOV	Lokomotiv Moscow **v** Atletico Madrid
3 NOV	RB Salzburg **v** Bayern Munich
25 NOV	Bayern Munich **v** RB Salzburg
25 NOV	Atletico Madrid **v** Lokomotiv Moscow
1 DEC	Lokomotiv Moscow **v** RB Salzburg
1 DEC	Atletico Madrid **v** Bayern Munich
9 DEC	Bayern Munich **v** Lokomotiv Moscow
9 DEC	RB Salzburg **v** Atletico Madrid

GROUP B

21 OCT	Real Madrid **v** Shakhtar Donetsk
21 OCT	Internazionale **v** Borussia Mochengladbach
27 OCT	Shakhtar Donetsk **v** Internazionale
27 OCT	Borussia Mochengladbach **v** Real Madrid
3 NOV	Shakhtar Donetsk **v** Borussia Mochengladbach
3 NOV	Real Madrid **v** Internazionale
25 NOV	Borussia Mochengladbach **v** Shakhtar Donetsk
25 NOV	Internazionale **v** Real Madrid
1 DEC	Shakhtar Donetsk **v** Real Madrid
1 DEC	Borussia Mochengladbach **v** Internazionale
9 DEC	Real Madrid **v** Borussia Mochengladbach
9 DEC	Internazionale **v** Shakhtar Donetsk

GROUP C

21 OCT	Manchester City **v** Porto
21 OCT	Olympiakos **v** Marseille
27 OCT	Marseille **v** Manchester City
27 OCT	Porto **v** Olympiakos
3 NOV	Manchester City **v** Olympiakos
3 NOV	Porto **v** Marseille
25 NOV	Olympiakos **v** Manchester City
25 NOV	Marseille **v** Porto
1 DEC	Marseille **v** Olympiakos
1 DEC	Porto **v** Manchester City
9 DEC	Manchester City **v** Marseille
9 DEC	Olympiakos **v** Porto

GROUP D

21 OCT	Ajax **v** Liverpool
21 OCT	Midtjylland **v** Atalanta
27 OCT	Liverpool **v** Midtjylland
27 OCT	Atalanta **v** Ajax
3 NOV	Atalanta **v** Liverpool
3 NOV	Midtjylland **v** Ajax
25 NOV	Liverpool **v** Atalanta
25 NOV	Ajax **v** Midtjylland
1 DEC	Liverpool **v** Ajax
1 DEC	Atalanta **v** Midtjylland
9 DEC	Midtjylland **v** Liverpool
9 DEC	Ajax **v** Atalanta

Momentum...Europa League winners Sevilla start their campaign against Chelsea

Chance to shine...Dortmund's Erling Haaland is regarded as one of the best youngsters in world football right now

GROUP E

20 OCT	Rennes **v** Krasnodar
20 OCT	Chelsea **v** Sevilla
28 OCT	Krasnodar **v** Chelsea
28 OCT	Sevilla **v** Rennes
4 NOV	Sevilla **v** Krasnodar
4 NOV	Chelsea **v** Rennes
24 NOV	Rennes **v** Chelsea
24 NOV	Krasnodar **v** Sevilla
2 DEC	Krasnodar **v** Rennes
2 DEC	Sevilla **v** Chelsea
8 DEC	Chelsea **v** Krasnodar
8 DEC	Rennes **v** Sevilla

GROUP F

20 OCT	Zenit **v** Club Brugge
20 OCT	Lazio **v** Borussia Dortmund
28 OCT	Club Brugge **v** Lazio
28 OCT	Borussia Dortmund **v** Zenit
4 NOV	Zenit **v** Lazio
4 NOV	Club Brugge **v** Borussia Dortmund
24 NOV	Lazio **v** Zenit
24 NOV	Borussia Dortmund **v** Club Brugge
2 DEC	Borussia Dortmund **v** Lazio
2 DEC	Club Brugge **v** Zenit
8 DEC	Zenit **v** Borussia Dortmund
8 DEC	Lazio **v** Club Brugge

History...Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo could face each other in the Champions League group stage for the first time

GROUP G

20 OCT	Dynamo Kiev **v** Juventus
20 OCT	Barcelona **v** Ferencvaros
28 OCT	Ferencvaros **v** Dynamo Kiev
28 OCT	Juventus **v** Barcelona
4 NOV	Barcelona **v** Dynamo Kiev
4 NOV	Ferencvaros **v** Juventus
24 NOV	Dynamo Kiev **v** Barcelona
24 NOV	Juventus **v** Ferencvaros
2 DEC	Ferencvaros **v** Barcelona
2 DEC	Juventus **v** Dynamo Kiev
8 DEC	Barcelona **v** Juventus
8 DEC	Dynamo Kiev **v** Ferencvaros

GROUP H

20 OCT	RB Leipzig **v** Istanbul Basaksehir
20 OCT	Paris Saint-Germain **v** Manchester United
28 OCT	Istanbul Basaksehir **v** Paris Saint-Germain
28 OCT	Manchester United **v** RB Leipzig
4 NOV	Istanbul Basaksehir **v** Manchester United
4 NOV	RB Leipzig **v** Paris Saint-Germain
24 NOV	Manchester United **v** Istanbul Basaksehir
24 NOV	Paris Saint-Germain **v** RB Leipzig
2 DEC	Istanbul Basaksehir **v** RB Leipzig
2 DEC	Manchester United **v** Paris Saint-Germain
8 DEC	RB Leipzig **v** Manchester United
8 DEC	Paris Saint-Germain **v** Istanbul Basaksehir

The favourites

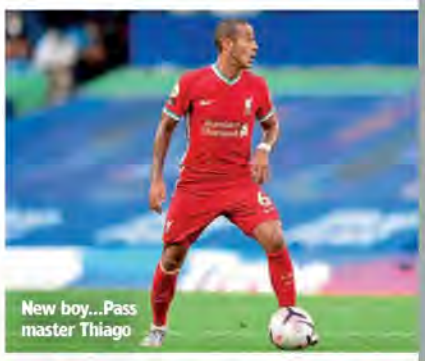
LIVERPOOL

Ready for another tilt at glory

In five years in charge at Anfield, German technical-area livewire Jurgen Klopp has already snagged one Champions League trophy (2018-19), finished as runner-up in the same competition (2017-18) and achieved a silver medal in the 2015-16 Europa League. Given the Reds' total domination of last season's Premier League and the club's long-standing love of continental head-to-heads, it would be a shock on a seismic scale if they did not progress deep into the 2020-21 edition.

Winning their first English league title in three decades has lifted a substantial weight from their shoulders. Yet don't expect the waves of relief to reduce the drive, hunger and focus which Klopp has instilled in his dynamic charges. Klopp tellingly talks about being "in the middle of something", of going for more titles. He has chosen his personnel carefully. No one will be jumping off this express train.

Many will justifiably argue that their squad is even stronger. New Spanish schemer Thiago Alcantara – lured away from Bayern Munich for a ridiculously low £27 million fee – will enliven the midfield area with his touch and vision, while recently-signed ex-Wolves forward Diogo Jota is just one more jewel in the Merseysiders' attacking crown. At £45m the most expensive forward in Liverpool's history, Jota can be inconsistent at times, but undoubtedly has plenty to bring to the table in terms of his direct style of play, boldness and flair for goals. As Klopp will have noted, he loves to press too.



New boy...Pass master Thiago

COACH

Jurgen Klopp
The most charismatic manager in the world today. Klopp has not only restored the club's standing in the English football hierarchy, but also turned out to be the spiritual son and heir to Bill Shankly.

KEY MAN

Alisson
Klopp's Liverpool were still in search of their first trophy when the Brazilian arrived in 2018. The cool and authoritative Alisson was the missing piece of the jigsaw.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Neco Williams
Composed and purposeful right-back, shortlisted for the 2020 Golden Boy award.

How important will rotation be?
Vital. Their high-octane *gegenpressing* style is demanding both physically and mentally. Several consecutive years of perpetual motion naturally takes its toll, thus increasing the need for more of a squad effort with good quality back-ups.

How important is it for Henderson to be fully fit and operational?
In the Liverpool engine room, skipper Jordan Henderson is the individual who oils the moving parts. The Sunderland-born man is at one and the same time, a link-man, a directional compass, limitless source of energy and work-rate monster.

Will Liverpool be at a disadvantage should Anfield be empty?
On a European night, the noise and passion generated at Anfield has proved the fuel for many an exploit. Undoubtedly the Reds will miss the incredible fervour of their 12th man. That said, striving and gritting their teeth is in the players' DNA.

MANCHESTER CITY

The pressure is on Pep to deliver

Incredibly for a coach considered to be one of the greatest tacticians of all time, nine years have passed since City boss Pep Guardiola masterminded his last triumph in the Champions League. He did not reach one final in his three years at the Bayern Munich helm and, since taking over at Manchester City, has never gone beyond the quarter-final stage. Has he lost his touch? Is he suffering from a curse or hoodoo? Whatever the reasons, Pep is, like it or not, under increasing pressure to break out of this tail-spin.

The key for City is consistency, making sure they find a way not to carelessly let their guard down. Last season they beat mighty Real Madrid home and away in the last 16. The scalp of the *Galacticos* should have been a platform for a full-throttle glory run. But at the next hurdle, it was the same old story, succumbing 3-1 to Lyon. City were clearly the better team and fashioned more chances. Yet ultimately were sent packing, let down by lapses in concentration and their vulnerability to swift counter-attacks.

Even with David Silva leaving the Etihad this summer for one last hurrah with Real Sociedad, City are still spoilt for choice in the attacking third. Last season, they became only the fifth Premier League side to hit 100 goals in a single campaign and there's no reason to believe that the flow of firepower will come to an end any time soon.

Star player...De Bruyne is vital

COACH

Pep Guardiola
With his insistence on possession and high pressing, Pep has earned his place in that select band of coaching pioneers. Success in three different countries are proof of his smarts and adaptability.

KEY MAN

Kevin De Bruyne
Creative genius who was voted the PFA Player of the Year for 2020. Registered no fewer than 23 assists in all competitions last term.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Ferran Torres
Exciting Spain winger, whose summer move was built on his fine Champions League displays for Valencia in 2019-20.

Can City solve their well-documented defensive deficiencies?
There is lot to put right. Individual losses of concentration at the back and a *laissez-faire* attitude to counter attacks are the major problems. The arrival of Portuguese centre-back Ruben Dias (ex-Benfica) should prove beneficial.

Does Pep overthink his strategy on the big occasion in Europe?
Without damning this monument of a coach, it is a valid argument. In European defeats with Bayern and City, he has at times outfoxed himself, gone overboard in looking for the revolutionary checkmate. His attempts at surprising the opposition only have had the opposite effect.

How important is Aguero's return?
When Argentine *goleador* Sergio Aguero is on the pitch, City always look far more formidable. Brazilian front-man Gabriel Jesus moves wonderfully off the ball, but can be wasteful in the red zone.

BAYERN MUNICH

Aiming to defend their crown

History says that the reigning European champions will find it tough to repeat last term's lap of honour. Dynasties are not easily forged at this level. Since the turn of the century, only one club – Real Madrid in 2016, 2017 and 2018 – have managed to claim consecutive titles. Can Bayern buck the trend? It's far from impossible. Apart from Liverpool midfielder Thiago Alcantara, all their main men remain on board and it could be argued that their squad is now even stronger. German international stopper Niklas Sule should be operational again after being sidelined for the best part of a year with damaged cruciate knee ligaments, while newly-arrived winger Leroy Sane, a €45 million acquisition from Manchester City, is just one more attacking thoroughbred in the stable. With Robert Lewandowski, Serge Gnabry, Kingsley Coman, Thomas Muller and Sane on the books, the Bavarians should have no trouble at all finding the back of the net.

Full credit to coach Hansi Flick. When he took over from the sacked Niko Kovac a year ago, the Bayern dressing room was in foment, grumbling and distracted. But it would not take long for the former Germany assistant boss to restore order and enthusiasm. Suddenly everyone in the dressing room was back on-message.

As though Flick had waved a magic wand, Bayern swiftly resumed normal service, racking up win upon win. Their Champions League record last season was especially majestic: 11 games, 11 wins and only behind on the scoreboard for a mere 14 minutes.

Is Hansi Flick correct when he insists that Bayern can still improve?

Well, he should know. According to him, his side needs to be better in its ball circulation, looking to play with more control and cutting out unnecessary possession breakdowns. The Bayern squad only has an average age of 25.3 years. Many of their players have bags of untapped potential.

Will the departure of midfield metronome Thiago to Liverpool have negative consequences?

The loss of the Spanish international midfielder does leave a hole. No doubt about it. Bayern will definitely miss his extraordinary ball-manipulation. He's an artist, rhythm controller and virtuoso. For seven years, he added an extra dimension to Bayern's play. On the other side of the coin, he was rather injury-prone in Bavaria.

Is there enough cover for the goal-hungry Lewandowski?

Should Lewandowski be sidelined for any length of time, Bayern will have a problem, though not an insurmountable one. They have a superb young back-up goal getter in Dutchman Joshua Zirkzee and in such an emergency, could also switch Serge Gnabry or Thomas Muller to a line-leading brief.

Goal machine...Last season's Champions League top scorer is hungry for more glory

COACH

Hansi Flick

Incredible to think that just 18 months ago, Flick was in the unemployment line, informed by Hoffenheim that they no longer required his services as director of sport. What a turnaround.

KEY MAN

Robert Lewandowski

At the age of 32, the Poland hitman is in the prime of his sporting life. The evidence? 55 goals in all competitions last season, including a whopping 15 in the Champions League.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Jamal Musiala

Bright as a button English-German attacking midfielder, who scored his first goal as a professional in September. The 17-year-old is now Bayern Munich's youngest-ever marksman.

The heavyweights

BARCELONA
Club in crisis

In order to win, every part of a football organisation – playing staff, boardroom, coaches and fan-base – has to be on the same page. Shame that Barca, so used to being top dogs, appear anything but united. For quite some time now, the Catalan giants have been stumbling from one crisis to another: terrible results, culminating in the surrender of their La Liga crown and 8-2 hammering by Bayern in the Champions League; star turn Lionel Messi trying and failing to escape from his golden handcuffs; debts piling up (recently announced at €488m); fans demanding the head of president Josep Maria Bartomeu and an extensive cull of players.

This is the shambolic workplace new coach Ronald Koeman has to operate in. It's a good thing Koeman is such a strong character. In this atmosphere of panic and civil war, he will have to be. As always at Barca, Lionel Messi holds the key. Already infuriated by Bartomeu's stewardship, Leo was even more irate on hearing that his close friend Luis Suarez was declared surplus to requirements, eventually to be picked up by Atletico Madrid.

Messi...Can he put the saga aside?

New signings such as the little Bosnian midfield rhythm-setter Miralem Pjanic (ex-Juventus), Portuguese wing sensation Trincao (Braga) and right-back Sergino Dest (Ajax) all are highly-talented individuals. Unfortunately for them, they have pitched up at exactly the wrong time. Chaos and toxicity certainly will not facilitate their integration.

COACH
Ronald Koeman
Netherlands' ever-influential libero was never going to say no to Barca. He's had some tough jobs, but compared to what he now faces, those were a walk in the park.

KEY MAN
Lionel Messi
He's frustrated and thinks, deep down, that he is wasting the autumn of his career. But he's still a genius and may well see the field of play as a sanctuary to forget his troubles.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Ansu Fati
Record-breaking is the 17-year-old's stock in trade. Barca's youngest-ever La Liga and Champions League goalscorer.

Is it time to dispense with Busquets?
For countless years, Sergio Busquets was the unsung lynchpin who set the tempo, masterly recycled possession and cleverly read the game with a timely interception. However his days of maximum efficiency are now long gone. If Koeman's insists on a double-pivot, it would have to feature Frenkie de Jong and Pjanic.

Do they have enough leaders?
In a word, no. While Barca boast many players of world-class ability, they are short of vocal, imposing characters who are unwilling to let matters drift. It's no coincidence that they've twice crumbled in recent years, folding in second-leg horror shows against Roma and Liverpool.

Can Griezmann turn things around?
Griezmann clearly has the skill-set to be a success. The bottom line is that he has to be played in his best position through the middle. Stationing him on the left is the original square peg in a round hole.

BORUSSIA DORTMUND
Turning promise into deliverance

Due to take part in their fifth straight pool stage, the *Schwarz-Gelben* will be looking to crash through the glass ceiling that has thwarted them in recent years. Since losing to Bayern in the 2013 final, Dortmund have tended to lose their bearings in the knockout phase, unable to do better than a couple of quarter-final appearances in 2013-14 and 2016-17.

The Ruhr outfit will be most keen to get last season's round of 16 elimination to PSG out of their system. This really was a tie they should have wrapped up. In the first leg at home, they deserved much more than a single-goal victory (2-1) and in the return at the Parc des Princes, Lucien Favre's side never moved out of second gear. Coach Favre and his merry men can and must do better.

In a massive boost for the Westfalenstadion side, 20-year-old wing wizard Jadon Sancho is staying for another season. The London-born youngster, who racked up 20 goals and as many assists last term, had been heavily linked with a summer move to Manchester United. However the Red Devils were not willing to meet Dortmund's £100 million valuation. Cue huge sighs of relief in Black-and-Yellow land. Dortmund centre-back Mats Hummels certainly was pleased to hear the news. "In lots of games he (Sancho) was the one to make the difference. His potential is limitless."

Staying...Sancho remains at BVB

COACH
Lucien Favre
The Swiss technician has a reputation as a master tactician who does not quite come up to the mark in big matches. In the last year of his contract, so very much needs a strong showing to silence his critics.

KEY MAN
Erling Haaland
"Nothing frightens me," claimed the 20-year-old after joining Dortmund in January. And why would it when he can pile up the goals in industrial quantities.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Giovanni Reyna
After lots of cameos last season, the USA attacking midfielder now looks a good bet to be a regular starter.

Will Brazilian starlet Reinier shine?
Dortmund general manager Michael Zorc is convinced he has pulled off a coup in sealing a 24-month deal for the creative attacker from Real Madrid, describing the teenager as "more or less the complete player". He can play as a number ten, on either flank or even as a false nine.

Where must Dortmund improve?
As a defensive unit, they must be more co-ordinated and attentive to danger. The unforced errors have to become a thing of the past and their counter-press has to function better as well.

Is a change of shape on the cards?
For much of last season, Favre opted for a three-man defence. Not that he has given up on the concept of a back four. "All the big teams use this set-up," he says, hinting that he was ready for a rethink. A possible recalibration would be a 4-2-3-1 formation, with a spot freed for a genuine number ten.

CHELSEA

Heavy investment increases expectation

At Stamford Bridge they clearly mean business. No other club in Europe spent more on new faces this summer, with the Blues' high command splashing out a cool £200 million on such young guns as Germany striker Timo Werner (former RB Leipzig), his compatriot, attacking midfielder Kai Havertz (Leverkusen), Leicester City and England left-back Ben Chilwell and Moroccan winger or central link-man Hakim Ziyech. If ever there was a statement of intent, this was it.

Nor was it the end of the recruitment drive. Also requiring a new dressing room locker were Senegalese keeper Edouard Mendy – who cost £22 million from Rennes – and a pair of Bosman free transfer centre-backs: PSG's stylish Brazilian Thiago Silva and Malang Sarr, a talented France Under-21 international who was subsequently sent on loan to Porto. The signing of Mendy was bad news indeed for erstwhile keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, whose penchant for crass errors has cost him dear.

Much will depend, of course, on how well the new arrivals settle in and integrate. A team's chemistry is a delicate affair and you mess with it at your peril. Last season, Frank Lampard's first as manager at the Bridge, the side's most significant assets were their unity and resilience. A substantial upgrade in quality is all well and good, but it can be a double-edged sword. Lampard has a delicate balancing act to perform. He has to find the right blend of new faces and old hands. The process will not be straightforward.

Will Lampard finally hit upon the formula for defensive stability?

At the moment, it seems a tall order. They leak way too many goals and it's not difficult to see why. In a little more than a season in charge, Lampard has tried numerous defensive combinations, so much so that a different blueprint appears almost every other week. A start would be a more disciplined approach to defending set-pieces.

Can N'Golo Kante rediscover his midfield dominance of old?

First of all, the France dynamo needs to stay out of the treatment room. Last term, he suffered four different injuries and missed some 15 games. Secondly, he has to play in his best position – stationed deep and centrally, but with license to roam across the midfield. Squashing him into a more advanced role or limiting him to an anchorman takes away much of his effectiveness.

Where now for Mason Mount and Tammy Abraham?

The young England pair, the homegrown poster boys of Chelsea last season, may be in for a tough time this term, possibly squeezed out of the first-team reckoning by the high-profile newcomers such as Havertz, Ziyech and Werner. Will Mount and Abraham have sufficient rotation opportunities to keep them happy? That's the conundrum for Lampard.

High expectations...Can Havertz live up to his monster price tag?

COACH

Frank Lampard
In just two years as a manager, Lampard has shown he has what it takes, steering Derby County to the Championship play-off final and Chelsea to a Premier League top-four finish last season. A prominent figure in the Chelsea side which won the Champions League in 2011-12.

KEY MAN

Timo Werner
Man in motion German striker or left-winger. Signed from RB Leipzig in a £54 million deal, he hit 34 goals for in all comps last season.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Kai Havertz
Rated by many as the best player of his generation, the ex-Leverkusen tyro, 21, cost Chelsea a club record fee of £72 million this summer.

The heavyweights

JUVENTUS

Pirlo set to cut his teeth at the top

Following their shock defeat to Lyon in last season's Champions League round of 16, it was inevitable that the Juventus board would respond by throwing coach Maurizio Sarri under the team bus. No matter that Sarri only had been in situ for one season and had just led the side to the 2019-20 Serie A title. Major European setbacks require a scapegoat and that was to be the coach. Much less predictable was the Turin club's choice of replacement, opting to engage Andrea Pirlo, who just a week earlier had been appointed as Juve's Under-23 boss.

The Juventus powers-that-be undoubtedly are taking a massive risk with the 41-year-old Pirlo. He has zero experience as a coach and in all their time as a top-flight club, the *Bianconeri* have never given the first-team keys to an absolute beginner. Juve's argument for choosing Pirlo for the top job is threefold. He once was a massively popular and successful playmaker with the club; he stands for attractive football; and his appointment sits well with the senior players, in particular the one and only Cristiano Ronaldo.

One of Pirlo's priorities is to help oversee the rejuvenation of the club's personnel squad and the pruning shears have been extensively used. While a number of 30-somethings – midfielder Miralem Panic, winger Douglas Costa, striker Gonzalo Higuain and defensive midfielder Blaise Matuidi – were allowed to move on, most of the squad new boys have relatively few miles on the clock. Juve have high hopes for the likes of Brazilian playmaker Arthur (24, Barcelona), American midfielder Weston McKennie (22, Schalke) and wingers Dejan Kulusevski (20, Atalanta), Federico Chiesa (22, Fiorentina) and Felix Correia (19, Manchester City).

Main man... Ronaldo will be key if Juve are to go all the way

COACH

Andrea Pirlo
In his heyday as a brilliant deep-lying playmaker, the newly-appointed Juve coach had good times a plenty in the Champions League, twice a winner with Milan (2002-03, 2006-07) and a silver medalist with Juve in 2015-16. Can he emulate that success as a coach?

KEY MAN

Cristiano Ronaldo
At 35 years young, he is nothing less than a Champions League goal machine, with 130 strikes in the competition. Depending on how much longer Messi plays beyond him, that figure may never be matched.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Weston McKennie
Dynamic, industrious Texan box-to-box midfielder, recruited on a season-long loan deal from German club Schalke.

What sort of football can we expect from an Andrea Pirlo side?

"My team must always boss the game, must always be in a pro-active, dominant position," said Pirlo at his Juve unveiling. He is looking for an increase in possession time, more defenders involved in build-up play and greater intensity in winning the ball back. He is likely to use either a 3-4-1-2 or a 4-3-3 formation.

How will they cope without young Dutch centre-back Matthijs de Ligt, following a shoulder operation?

Pirlo will look to old-timers Giorgio Chiellini (36) and Leonardo Bonucci (33) to take up the slack. Chiellini himself spent most of last season on injured reserve, laid low by a cruciate ligament injury. Other central defensive options may include young Turk Merih Demiral or using the Brazilian right-back Danilo in a three-man set-up.

How patient are the Juventus board likely to be with Pirlo?

Given his status as a novice coach, they will give him all the time he needs to settle in and learn on the job. There will be no knee-jerk responses to reverses. He is their third boss in three years. The aim is for a long-term project. President Andrea Agnelli and company understand that this will not be a linear journey, that missteps along the way are inevitable.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

Hoping to take the next step

After repeated knockout-stage debacles, the *nouveaux riche* Parisians finally lived up to their princely status last season, achieving a highly-commendable runners-up spot after defeat to Bayern in Lisbon. No longer the continental nearly men, no longer with a monkey on their back, the feeling in the camp is that they are now psychologically free to push onwards and upwards. One thing is for sure – they are not assuming "job done". PSG's Qatari backers will not be satisfied until the club's first Champions League title is safely stored away.

Some claim they rely too much on superstar attackers, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe. The truth is you can never have too much stratospheric quality. As long as the dynamic duo deliver the goods, PSG can confidently expect to be in contention. In a perfect world, the pair should be straining every sinew to definitively establish themselves as the successors to Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. No doubt about it; in the shape of Neymar, Mbappe and Argentina right-wing ace Angel Di Maria, PSG boast one of the most potent front lines in Europe.

The Ligue 1 giants do have their issues, of course. They are short of top-class options at full-back – especially after left-back Juan Bernat recently tore cruciate ligaments – and only have a workaday midfield. With long-serving centre-back Thiago Silva moving to Chelsea, the role of defensive controller and team leader will go to his fellow countryman Marquinhos. Last season the latter was rather wasted in a midfield holding role.

Deadly duo... the best attack in world football?

COACH

Thomas Tuchel
The German remains a much-criticised figure. His detractors accuse him of failing, in his two years in charge, to bed down a distinctive playing identity. Brought in with the reputation of a master tactician, the ex-Mainz and Dortmund coach has yet to fully prove himself in France.

KEY MAN

Neymar
The Brazilian may not be everyone's cup of tea. Even so, no one can deny that the maverick literally dragged PSG to last season's Champions League final.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Colin Dagba
Homegrown France Under-21 right-back who is hoping to fill the void left by the departure of Belgian international Thomas Meunier to Dortmund.

Is Argentina striker Mauro Icardi destined only to serve as supersub?
With Neymar used as a false nine, it would seem so. Last season, his first at PSG following a switch from Inter, the *goleador* very much blew hot and cold, often showing his limitations in big games. Not enough mobility or work rate.

Have PSG taken their eye off the ball with regard to midfield manpower?
Unquestionably. Over recent years, Thiago Motta, Blaise Matuidi and Adrien Rabiot have all made for the Parc des Princes exit and not been replaced. The little Italian playmaker Marco Verratti – who does tend to be somewhat injury prone – will this season be joined by Danilo Pereira from Porto and Rafinha from Barcelona.

Do they have a discipline problem?
The three red cards – for Neymar, Layvin Kurzawa and Leandro Paredes – they received at the tail-end of the Marseille defeat would suggest so. They lost their cool and their self-control. Such excesses cannot happen again. "I can't defend the indefensible," declared director of sport Leonardo.

REAL MADRID

Record winners want crown back

As much as *Los Blancos* enjoyed winning the latest La Liga race – thus ending a two-year league title drought – the fact remains that Real truly define themselves by conquests in the Champions League. Winners of the competition on a record 13 occasions, Real see it as their domain, their property. Round of 16 exits in each of the past two seasons (at the hands of Ajax and Manchester City) are seen as the height of humiliation. Coach Zinedine Zidane and his players know only too well that a similar underachieving scenario will have grave consequences.

Zidane, who led Real to three straight European crowns from 2016 to 2018, no longer benefits from that invincible aura. The Manchester City defeat was the first time he had ever lost a knockout game at this level. Victorious in his 12 previous ties, Zidane had further to fall than most. He will be especially keen for redemption. And that means going all the way. On securing the 2019-20 Spanish title, he claimed that winning the domestic league was more satisfying than winning in Europe. Should we take him at his word?

As always Real will be tremendously reliant on the wise old heads in their ranks. Skipper and tower of power centre-back Sergio Ramos, who has now been at the club for a decade-and-a-half; German midfield general Toni Kroos and evergreen French striker Karim Benzema, who is only behind Cristiano Ronaldo and Raul on Real's list of top scorers in European competition. After an injury-ravaged first season at the Bernabeu, a fit-again Eden Hazard could also make a world of difference in the attacking third.

Benzema...A firm Zidane favourite

COACH

Zinedine Zidane
The Champions League has been Zizou's own private garden, appearing in three finals as a player, winning it once – with Real in 2001-02 – and then coaching the club to consecutive titles in 2016, 2017 and 2018. An immortal in this competition.

KEY MAN

Sergio Ramos
Captain courageous, massive competitor and infuriating provocateur for those in the opposition camp. A centre-back made from granite.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Martin Odegaard
Real believe they've backed a winner with the 21-year-old creative midfielder, especially after seeing him shine on loan last season at Real Sociedad.

What are Zidane's strengths?
In his aura as an iconic player, his humility, calmness and ability to man-manage a squad jam-packed with stellar names. Yes, he had his problems with Gareth Bale. But on the whole, he has dealt superbly with the abundance of egos in the squad.

Is the current XI more impressive defensively than in attacking mode?
In many ways they are. On returning for a second spell as coach in March 2019, Zidane took the pragmatic decision to have all the bases covered to the rear, to be more collectively organised. The reason? Because Cristiano Ronaldo had left for Juventus and Zizou could no longer rely on his goalscoring exploits.

Is Real Madrid solely a place for ready-made superstars?
Not so much these days. Recruitment-wise, Real now target youngsters of immense potential and currently boast a marvellous stable of tomorrow's heroes, including Brazilian forwards Rodrygo and Vinicius Jr., Uruguayan midfielder Fede Valverde, Odegaard and Ukrainian back-up keeper Andriy Lunin.

The dark horses

AJAX

Next crop of youngsters ripe and ready

Much water has passed under the bridge since Ajax dazzled en route to the last four of the 2018-19 Champions League, stylishly seeing off Real Madrid and Juventus before throwing away their semi-final confrontation with Tottenham. Centre-back Matthijs de Ligt and midfield strategist Frenkie de Jong exited stage left immediately, while two other members of their attacking-third "Dream Team", Donny van de Beek and Hakim Ziyech departed this summer. However a new crop of talent is always waiting in the wings in Amsterdam, and in midfielder Ryan Gravenberch, centre-back Perr Schuurs and Burkino Faso striker Lassina Traore, they have a real next generation of quality ready to earn their stripes.

Forever searching the globe for young talent, the Ajax management is justifiably excited about two of their latest signings. 20-year-old Brazilian right-winger Antony (ex-Sao Paulo) and precocious Ghanaian attacking midfielder Mohammed Kudus – picked up from Danish side Nordsjaelland – are brimming over with potential and seem sure to figure prominently in the plans of first-team coach Erik ten Hag. Ten Hag has a score to settle in Europe. He believes his team would have qualified from last season's group phase if VAR and refereeing decisions had not gone against them in matches v Chelsea (a 1-0 home loss and 4-4 draw at Stamford Bridge).

Ajax's next big thing...Schuurs

In welcome news, Dutch international centre-back Daley Blind has recovered from a pre-season heart scare.

COACH

Erik ten Hag
Progressive boss for whom positional changes and clever use of the flanks are paramount. Spent two years (2013-15) in charge of Bayern Munich's reserves.

KEY MAN

Dusan Tadic
Cultured Serbia international capable of supplying goals and assists from any position in the front line or as a central playmaker. Club captain.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Perr Schuurs
Technically excellent central defender in his first season as an automatic starter. Recently earned his first Dutch national team call-up.

Can Ajax cope without Sergino Dest?
Absolutely. They already have a fine right-back in the shape of Moroccan Noussair Mazraoui. The 22-year-old was an attacking midfielder during his time at the *Ajacied* academy and how it shows in his bold, creative full-back play.

Who will lead the line this term?
Ten Hag has been experimenting with Moroccan international Zakaria Labyad in the role of centre-forward. Normally, free-kick expert Labyad plays out wide or as an attacking midfielder. Up-and-coming west African Traore is another option, as is veteran striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar.

Where is competition the hottest?
On the right wing, where two Brazilians, David Neres and new boy Antony will do battle for the favours of Ten Hag. Antony, an electrifying bundle of tricks and goal threat, has looked the part so far, while Neres is slowly being re-introduced following a long-term knee injury.

ATALANTA

Everyone's second team to go again

The Bergamo club, third in Serie A for the second consecutive season, feel they have unfinished business in the Champions League. Last term, in their first-ever adventure in the European big league, they surpassed all expectations by reaching the last eight and were indeed within a couple of minutes of knocking out PSG, tragically conceding twice at the death after leading 1-0.

Atalanta is a club apart in today's corporate football world. Located in Lombardy, theirs is a Cinderella story, the tale of an organisation which prefers to grow organically, picking up inexpensive talent from wherever they can and nurturing youngsters in their prolific academy. Club president Antonio Percassi thinks they currently have five or six youngsters ready to make the transition from youth team to the pro squad. This summer, they were typically prudent, limiting their outlay on fresh faces to €7 million on young Dutch centre-forward Sam Lammers and €14.5 million on Lokomotiv Moscow and Russia playmaker Aleksey Miranchuk. Impressive Belgian full-back Timothy Castagne left for Leicester City.

Gomez...Serie A's best midfielder in 2019-20

Importantly for a city which has suffered terribly in the last few months with coronavirus, Atalanta will be hosting Champions League games for the first time this autumn. Because of renovation work at their Gewiss Stadium, they had to play European games 50km away at Milan's San Siro last season.

COACH

Gian Piero Gasperini
A bold, innovative thinker, the ex-Juve youth-team player has worked a minor miracle transforming Atalanta from relegation candidates into a Serie A and European force.

KEY MAN

Papu Gomez
Gasperini describes the Argentine as the "soul of the team". The number ten or second striker is the side's technical heartbeat.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Jacopo Da Riva
Enterprising, teenage midfielder, who in only his second game with the pros, came on as a sub in last season's loss to PSG.

What makes Atalanta so entertaining?
The intensity of their movement, sense of adventure, taste for the jugular and sheer love of risk taking. They flood the opposition box with runners and when piling forward, are never afraid to leave the back door open. There's no fear here.

Is their style a double-edged sword?
Yes, of course. There were unmistakable signs towards the back-end of last term that they were running out of puff, thus rendering themselves much weaker defensively. They can only hope that they had enough rest during the off-season to recharge their batteries.

What has happened to Josip Ilicic?
For several months Ilicic has completely disappeared. The only comment from the club was that his absence was due to "personal reasons". Some say he may be suffering from depression. Whatever has occurred, all of his team-mates are pulling for the 32-year-old.

ATLETICO MADRID

Simeone's charges are ready for war

Early this year, the word in the Spanish press was that long-serving Atletico coach Diego Simeone was losing his once-iron grip on the dressing room, that a number of players were rebelling against his ultra-demanding physical conditioning regime and safety-first tactics. Was it the beginning of the end? Not a bit of it. In March, his warrior crew famously beat holders Liverpool home and away in the round of 16 and the *Colchoneros* proved equally resilient in the latter stages of La Liga, recovering from a mediocre start to secure a third-place finish. Simeone came in for a lot of criticism in the wake of his side's surprise Champions League quarter-final defeat to RB Leipzig, with many claiming he had got his team selection wrong. Not that Simeone is going anywhere. After leading Atletico to some of their finest hours - the La Liga title in 2013-14 and Champions League runner-up spots in 2013-14 and 2015-16 - he still has more than sufficient credit left in the bank.

The signing of Barcelona's unwanted Uruguayan striker Luis Suarez could be just what the doctor ordered. Costing a mere €6m, Suarez, 33, plainly has a point to prove following his Nou Camp defenestration. Last season, Atleti often lacked punch in the red zone. Suarez, a 30-goal-a-season man, looks like the patent remedy.

Suarez...New challenge

All at Atletico will be keeping their fingers crossed that Portuguese attacking boy wonder Joao Felix makes more of a contribution this term. Felix, the club's most expensive-ever player - bought from Benfica in the summer of 2019 for €127m - only produced in fits and starts in 2019-20. Will class prevail?

COACH

Diego Simeone
The uncompromising *El Cholo* is the man with the Midas touch, who can turn a team of supposed inferior quality into victors. His philosophy will never change: counter-attacking wiles, defensive compactness, set-piece prowess and an underdog mentality.

KEY MAN

Jan Oblak
The Slovenian has to be one of the top three goalkeepers in the world. In sensational form for Atleti last season, he is worth every penny of his €120 million release clause.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Renan Lodi
22-year-old Brazilian left-back who since arriving in the Spanish capital last year, has added defensive rigour to his exceptional ability on the overlap.

What must be Simeone's number one priority in the months ahead?
Defensively Atletico did not perform to their usual bank vault standards last season. Forming an impenetrable rearguard barrier is page one of the Simeone gospel and he will be at pains to repair the holes which opened up from time to time in 2019-20.

Is bad boy Diego Costa finished now that Luis Suarez has been signed?
Not necessarily. Simeone may well deploy both in what would be a mean and combative forward-line combo. In this set up, Joao Felix would move out to the wing. Alternatively Costa could be used as impact-substitute mode.

Apart from goalkeeper Jan Oblak and Suarez, who are the other untouchables in the team?
Undoubtedly the central midfield duo of Koke and Saul. Much of Atletico's effectiveness flows through them. The pair are key to the pressing game in that central zone and provide much of the team's drive, fluidity and tactical awareness transitioning from defence to attack. If they are standing, they play.

INTERNAZIONALE

Conte trying to build on last term

Most keepers of the *Nerazzurri* faith would concur that 2019-20 was Inter's best season for a decade. Spearheaded by the prolific front line of Romelu Lukaku and Lautaro Martinez, the men in the black-and-blue stripes frequently proved irresistible, coming within a whisker of beating Juve to the Serie A crown and making lots of headway in the Europa League, losing 3-2 in the final to Sevilla. Strange then that coach Antonio Conte was visibly disgruntled at the end of the campaign, claiming that the club had offered him "little protection". Rumours abounded during the summer that he was about to walk away, though all would calm down again following a face-to-face with club president Steven Zhang.

As a consequence of the summit, Conte has taken control of Inter's transfer plans. For the most part, his picks have been senior service types: 33-year-old Chilean all-action midfielder Arturo Vidal (ex-Barca), Serbian left-back Aleksandar Kolarov (34, Roma) and another high-profile Chilean in attacker Alexis Sanchez, who has now sealed a permanent deal.

Probably Inter's wisest move, though, was capturing 21-year-old Morocco wing-back Achraf Hakimi. During a two-year loan spell at Dortmund from Real Madrid, he developed into a quite sensational performer, especially valuable when bursting forward on the counter-attack.

Super strikeforce... Lautaro and Lukaku

COACH

Antonio Conte
A tactical obsessive with an eye for the minutest of details, a supreme motivator and totally dedicated to winning. Wherever he has taken charge he has delivered wins and a much-improved collective and individual output.

KEY MAN

Romelu Lukaku
Something of a disappointment during his time at Manchester United, the bustling Belgian striker has looked far more sleeker, willing and effective since joining Inter.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Alessandro Bastoni
21-year-old central defender, who cost €33 million when Inter signed him from Atalanta three years ago. Matured a great deal during a loan stint at Parma.

Why does Antonio Conte often end up falling out with his employers?
That is the perfectionist nature of the man. He is not nicknamed "The Hammer" for nothing. He is uncompromising, he speaks his mind and if he has a problem with boardroom decisions, he tends to air them publicly. In his binary world, you are either with him or against him.

What's happened to Christian Eriksen?
If the Denmark playmaker, a €20m signing from Tottenham early this year, is struggling for big-match game time, it's principally because he does not fit the Inter system. Conte wants all-action types in the middle of the park who put in a defensive shift. Out of possession, Eriksen can be found wanting.

How will Inter fill the huge void if Lukaku or Martinez are unavailable?
The call will go out to 21-year-old back-up striker Andrea Pinamonti, whom Inter recently reacquired from Genoa. Pinamonti, very impressive for Italy's Under-20s at the 2019 World Cup, is already on the radar of *Azzurri* boss Roberto Mancini.

The dark horses

MANCHESTER UNITED

Jekyll and Hyde displays a real worry

The problem with Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side is that you never know which version of the Red Devils is going to turn up. Will it be the A team which won seven of their ten matches against top six clubs in the Premier League last season? Or the side which was hammered in home defeats by Crystal Palace and Spurs this season? After missing out on the Champions League in 2019-20, there's every reason to believe that the big-match stakes will bring out the best of their most prominent stars – midfielders Paul Pogba and Bruno Fernandes and striker Marcus Rashford.

One of Solskjaer biggest dilemmas is the composition of his midfield. An engine room made up of Pogba, Fernandes and new £35m Dutch signing Donny van de Beek is a mouthwatering prospect offensively. But how useful will the trio be when they have to turn around and try to stifle opposition counter-attacks? At the highest level in Europe, such a formula may just be too adventurous. The more logical move would have the experienced Serb Nemanja Matic or the promising Scott McTominay anchoring in front of the back four.

Red Devils new boy...Van de Beek

United desperately need to make a better fist of defending as well. Repeated howlers from Spanish keeper David De Gea shines a light on a player in decline. And just as worrying is the lack of pace and mobility in central defence of Harry Maguire and Victor Lindelof. Right now, the pair are struggling to live up to their expensive price-tags.

COACH

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer
Now approaching two years at the helm, Solskjaer has had his ups and downs in the Old Trafford hot seat. The highlight? A memorable victory v PSG in a Champions League last 16 tie in March 2019.

KEY MAN

Bruno Fernandes
The Portugal ace has improved United immeasurably going forward. Superb in his touch, vision and wide range of activity.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Mason Greenwood
With the English tabloids very much on his trail, the striker needs to concentrate on what he does best – finding the net.

Does Solskjaer have the track record to lead such a behemoth as United?
In truth, his spells in charge of Molde and Cardiff City should not have been a passport to the United dugout. He may be an icon for all the goals he scored for the club, but he simply does not belong in the top bracket of European coaches.

Is a lack of quality at full-back holding The Red Devils back?
While Aaron Wan-Bissaka and Luke Shaw are generally solid, neither offers enough in an attacking sense, with both short of penetrative panache and final ball accuracy. New signing Alex Telles may offer a solution.

Is Donny van de Beek a bargain?
Certainly. The 23-year-old has it all: work rate, ball-winning ability, excellent range of passing, positional awareness, clever in the timing of his runs and an assured finisher. Players with only a fraction of his ability have commanded much higher fees.

MARSEILLE

Underestimate them at your peril

Against a backdrop of severe financial degradation – debts of around €100m – OM have proved remarkably resilient on the field of play in the last 12 months, securing a most unexpected second-place finish in Ligue 1 and thus qualifying for their first Champions League group phase since 2013-14. Europe's top club competition means a great deal in these parts, with many still fondly remembering the glory days of the 1990s, when the club lifted the trophy (1992-93) and were unlucky to lose on penalties to Red Star Belgrade in the 1990-91 final. It is a source of considerable pride that the Provencal outfit remain the only French club to ever win the Champions League.

Coach Andre Villas-Boas, now in his second term at the Stade Velodrome, has built a gutsy and meticulously-organised team worth much more than the sum of its parts. They are smart tactically and hard to outmanoeuvre. This "bend but don't break" toughness was particularly evident in their 1-0 victory at PSG in September, their first win over their arch-rivals in nine long and frustrating years.

Payet...Creative king

Naturally their economic difficulties have rendered expensive new signings impossible. New director of sport Pablo Longoria has had to rummage for cast-offs, bargains and Bosman frees. Fresh faces include young Argentine centre-back Leonardo Balerdi (on loan from Dortmund), Le Havre midfielder Pape Gueye (ex-Le Havre) and veteran Japan full-back Yuto Nagatomo (Galatasaray).

COACH

Andre Villas-Boas
Once thought of as a "Mini-Mourinho", he ran into a brick wall during unproductive spells in charge of Chelsea and Spurs in the Premier League. Now on the up again with a resurgent OM.

KEY MAN

Dimitri Payet
Brilliant left-sided playmaker now in his second stint at the Stade Velodrome. When the 33-year-old shines, the entire side dazzles.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Boubacar Kamara
Athletic, imposing and intelligent midfield holder or centre-back. Arguably the most valuable player in the squad.

What will be Marseille's objectives?
OM lost all six group games in 2013-14, and some might suggest that as long as they win one or two this time around, no one will complain. AVB, however, is more ambitious. He thinks his team can be surprise packages. The recent victory over PSG may be a sign that he is right.

Has AVB's management style changed since his Premier League days?
It most certainly has. He no longer is the arrogant young pup who believed he was the fount off all knowledge. He has learnt to listen to his players, and at Marseille the squad have been happy to follow him.

Any strengths and weaknesses?
Left-back is particularly barren, with both Jordan Amavi and Nagatomo having their shortcomings. In marked contrast, Croat Duje Caleta-Car is developing into a top-class rearguard sentinel. The attacking threat comes from out wide, where duo Payet and Florian Thauvin are stationed.

RB LEIPZIG

Continuing to make rapid progress

The *Roten Bullen*, as ambitious as they are lavishly funded, passed a crucial milestone in their elite project last term, reaching the semi-finals of the Champions League for the first time in their history. In victories against Zenit, Tottenham and Atletico Madrid, the Leipziger very much looked the part in the upper echelons of the European game: tactically astute, unified and compact, calm under pressure and opportunistic in "big-point" moments. Great work by boy wonder coach Julian Nagelsmann, who at just 33, is now the youngest boss to guide a team to the Champions League last four.

The Saxon club have come a long way in a short time. They have just 16 Champions League fixtures under their belt and last season was only their second campaign in the competition. It's worth noting that in their inaugural appointment with the Euro big boys in 2017-18, they did not even qualify from the group phase. "It's been a crazy journey," says Nagelsmann. Sensible decision-making, sound planning and continuity have been the watchwords of the RB success story. Sticking to a clear philosophy – concentrating on the recruitment of young talents and employing a fast-paced, direct playing style – they have built step-by-step. What's remarkable is how little their personnel has changed in recent times. Of the group which beat Atletico Madrid 2-1 in the quarter-finals last campaign, no fewer than seven of them featured in the squad which won promotion to the Bundesliga back in 2016.

Hwang...Ready to fill Werner's void

COACH

Julian Nagelsmann
The bright young thing of European football strategists, he even gave wily Atletico boss Diego Simeone a lesson in tactical chess during a Champions League face-off last season. He'll be in charge at Bayern or a leading Premier League outfit one day soon.

KEY MAN

Kevin Kampl
The 30-year-old Slovenian central midfielder is not only the oldest outfield player in the Leipzig side; he is the most influential. Dynamic, feisty, excellent in his distribution and a real leader.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Tyler Adams
USA international defensive midfielder who popped up with the winner v Atletico. Nagelsmann thinks he may be suited to a central defensive role.

Has the sale of Timo Werner damaged them irreparably?

Even the most optimistic RB fan would have to admit that the departure to Chelsea this summer of prolific striker Werner leaves a major void in attack. Newly-signed frontrunners, South Korea's Hwang Hee-chan (ex-Salzburg) and Alexander Sorloth (Crystal Palace and Trabzonspor) have a hard act to follow.

What are the basic principles of Nagelsmann's philosophy?

He espouses all the tenets of a modern 21st century coach: the Klopp-like obsession with an intense high press, tactical flexibility, and rapid attacking transitions aiming to arrive in the opposition box in a matter of seconds.

In which area has RB improved?

What their 2019-20 Champions League run underlined was the strides they have made in the art of keeping possession. Nagelsmann has developed a sort of collective awakening, with slicker combination play, more support options and most important of all, a lot more patience. Their many youngsters are finally growing up.

SEVILLA

Europa League specialists to step up?

Recently triumphant in their sixth Europa League final, the Andalusians truly are experts in winning continental trophies. Proud of their 100 per cent record in European finals, Sevilla have carved out a niche for themselves as a new-millennium sensation, condensing all their cross-frontier successes into the last 14 years. The Champions League, however, has been a rather different story for them, only involved in a half-dozen campaigns and reaching the quarter-finals just once, in 2017-18.

Sevilla, fourth in the last edition of La Liga, come into the new campaign on an emotional high. In the second half of 2019-20, they were unstoppable, remaining undefeated for 21 fixtures at home and abroad. Great work by coach Julen Lopetegui, who in his first season in charge at the Sanchez Pizjuan stadium, managed to turn what was ostensibly a period of transition into a match-winning procession. Incredibly nine of his 11 starters in August's Europa League final victory over Internazionale were new to the club at the start of the season.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the new campaign will be Sevilla's response to the departure of influential playmaker Ever Banega to Saudi side Al Shabab. In two spells over five seasons, the diminutive Banega was the man who made them tick. Also making an exit was fast-improving young left-back Sergio Reguilon, who now features for Spurs. After six years starring at Barcelona, versatile Croatian link-man Ivan Rakitic is back for a second tour of duty here.

Superstar...Can Ocampos repeat last season's heroics?

COACH

Julen Lopetegui
Once a reserve team goalkeeper at Real Madrid, the Basque has bounced back remarkably at Sevilla after a nightmarish 2018, when, in the space of just five months, he lost two dream jobs, dumped by both the Spanish national team and Real Madrid.

KEY MAN

Lucas Ocampos
Fiery, totally-committed Argentine winger, who enjoyed a superb inaugural season with Sevilla in 2019-20, emerging as a fine taker of chances.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Oscar Rodriguez
Gifted young attacking midfielder acquired earlier this summer from Real Madrid. On loan at Leganes for the past two campaigns.

How important is director of sport Monchi to the well-being of the club?

Without their famous transfer wizard, Sevilla arguably would be far removed from the European top table. In 2019 he performed a minor miracle, overseeing a whirlwind of transfer market activity – 17 buys and even more departures – and still laying the foundations for success.

Who's the biggest mystery to the fans?

That would be Dutch target man Luuk de Jong. Often decried for a lack of technique, the much-travelled striker (ex-Twente, Gladbach, Newcastle and PSV) had the last laugh in the Europa League last term, scoring the winner in the semi-final versus Manchester United and adding two more in the final victory over Internazionale.

Who could be their secret weapon?

Versatile attacker Munir El Haddadi, who is comfortable in a variety of front-line roles and often decisive when coming on as a substitute. Once regarded as one of Barcelona's most promising youngsters, the 25-year-old Spanish-Moroccan has yet to make that top-level breakthrough, but the raw material is there.

Targetting the last 16

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH

Germany's sleeping giants on the rise

Little wonder, Gladbach supporters swear by coach Marco Rose. Last season, his first in charge of the Foals, the 44-year-old barely made a bad call, steering them to an excellent fourth-place in the Bundesliga – their best classification since 2014-15. Roses were blooming all over at Borussia Park in 2019-20. Twenty wins out of 34 top-flight fixtures, bags of dynamic attacking football and, as the cherry on the cake, the club's first Champions League in four years. Gladbach have only participated in two previous campaigns at this level, but with the inspirational Rose at the helm they will be a tough nut to crack. Rose, for one, has no intention of resting on his laurels: "We've set the bar high. Now we want to take the next step. There's plenty of room for further gains."

The bad news concerns their injury list. New Austrian right-sided midfielder Valentino Lazaro – brought in on loan from Internazionale – could miss the early Champions League dates with a calf complaint, while Swiss engine-room powerhouse Denis Zakaria may be a little rusty after a long knee rehabilitation process.

Rising star... Nehaus

COACH

Marco Rose
There's a lot of Jurgen Klopp in the ex-RB Salzburg boss. The same killer instinct, huge enthusiasm and motivational powers. Played under Klopp at Mainz for seven years.

KEY MAN

Matthias Ginter
Unassuming Germany centre-back, who is arguably the best in his position in the Bundesliga.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Florian Neuhaus
Intelligent central midfielder, 23, and one of the new faces in Joachim Low's Germany squad.

How would you define Marco Rose's modus operandi?

First and foremost, his is a style of play which is not for the faint-hearted, based on intense activity when out of possession, a high press, sprints galore and a permanent quest to get around the back of a defence. They have a cultured side too, looking to keep the ball on the ground with short, snappy passing combinations. Keeping a compact shape is vital to his footballing philosophy as well.

What is Rose's biggest headache?

Clearly his abundance of attacking talent. With the likes of Alassane Plea, Marcus Thuram, Lars Stindl, Breel Embolo, Patrick Herrmann and Jonas Hofmann at his disposal, he is spoilt for choice. Rose cannot possibly fit them all into his starting line-up. One or two have to be left out. The common denominator of this group of forwards? Their versatility.

LAZIO

Inzaghi continues to inspire Romans

The coach of the White and Sky Blues, Simone Inzaghi, certainly knows how to make a Champions League splash. Back in March 2000, Inzaghi, then leading the line for Lazio, pulled off a feat for the ages, netting four goals in a 5-1 thrashing of Marseille. One of only 14 players to have scored four or more goals in one game, Inzaghi remains to this day, the sole Italian to have "quadrupled". Some two decades later, the 44-year-old now has a chance to make more Lazio history as the *Biancocelesti* look to make hay in their first Champions League proper since 2007-08.

In the club's entire history, they have only twice reached the last 16 of UEFA's top tournament (in 1999-2000 and 2000-01). But let's not write them off because of a lack of pedigree. Inzaghi is an excellent man-manager and tactician, they have one of Europe's most prolific strikers in Ciro Immobile – who last term hit a record-equalling 36 Serie A goals – and as they comprehensively proved last term, they are nobody's pushovers. Don't be fooled by their fourth-place finish. For much of the season, they were very much in contention for the title, going 21 games undefeated, beating Juventus at the Stadio Olimpico in December (3-1) and winning their first league game at Milan in 30 years.

Hot-shot... Immobile

COACH

Simone Inzaghi
Spent the majority of his playing career at Lazio, six seasons as youth-team coach, and first-team boss since 2016. Younger brother of Filippo Inzaghi, the ex-Milan and Italy striker.

KEY MAN

Ciro Immobile
Serie A top scorer in 2013-14 with Torino, and in 2017-18 and 2019-20 with Lazio. Also won last term's European Golden Shoe. Clinical No.9.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Luiz Felipe
Watchful Brazilian central defender. Plucked from the obscurity of Brazil's fourth tier in 2016.

What makes Simone Inzaghi stand out as a coach?

Undoubtedly his positive outlook, unbridled passion and success in fostering a "band of brothers" mentality within his squad. Rather than assembling a football team, he has created a family, made up of people instead of sportsmen. That's a rare achievement. His love of the Lazio colours is there for all to see. This commitment to the cause clearly brings the best out of his players, most of whom have improved greatly on his watch.

In attacking mode, how do Lazio set out to hurt the opposition?

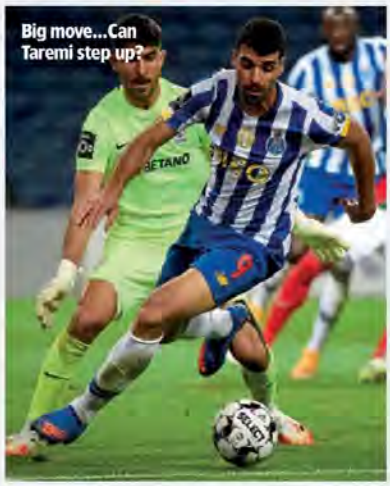
Principally, they aim to get their best technical players – creative midfielders Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Luis Alberto and second striker Joaquin Correa – on the ball as much as possible. This trio are in their element in one-on-one situations and once in the clear, look, more often than not, to release main striker Immobile into space behind the defence.

PORTO

Not easy on the eye, but effective

Porto were not the most attractive side in Portugal last season. Such shortcomings, however, counted for little as the Dragons won their 29th league title. No one can say they did not deserve their success. They were solid, aggressive, unified and consistent. They failed to score in only one game all season and were victorious in all four head-to-heads versus fellow big-hitters Benfica and Sporting.

Not all in the garden is rosy, though. Their failure to qualify for Champions League football last term has left them in a precarious financial situation, which inevitably resulted in the sale of some key players. Moreover, they still are subject to a number of FFP transfer restrictions.



Big move...Can Taremi step up?

COACH

Sergio Conceicao
The side is a 100 per cent reflection of his character: combative and uncomplicated. Known for his feisty press conferences.

KEY MAN

Pepe
Evergreen centre-back who sets the emotional tone for the entire team.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Fabio Vieira
Attacking midfielder, 20, with a wand for a left foot. Top talent.

What's the reaction been to Fabio Silva, Danilo and Alex Telles leaving?
Bad. While the sale of Fabio Silva alone netted a cool £35.6m – not bad at all for a 19-year-old with just a handful of first-team starts – large swathes of Porto fans were only interested in what the deals say about the club's lack of ambition.

In what ways do they threaten most?
They are very dangerous from set-pieces, with a wide range of well-choreographed routines and several superb exponents of a dead-ball delivery. Opponents also need to watch out for their new Iranian striker Mehdi Taremi, who was brought in from Rio Ave. This could be his year.

RENNES

Cup specialists ready to cause a stir

The Bretons will enjoy their first-ever taste of Champions League wine. The *Rouge et Noirs* are traditionally known in France as a cup team, always capable of raising their game in knockout mode. Last season, though, they discovered the recipe for domestic league succes. The third-highest step on the Ligue 1 podium, their best-ever finish, was a just reward for a durable, tightly-knit group.

Not a club to traditonally splash out, they were unusually busy this summer signing wingers Jeremy Doku (Anderlecht) and Martin Terrier (Lyon), striker Serhou Guirassy (Amiens) and goalkeeper Alfred Gomis (Dijon), while Edouard Mendy and Raphinha left for the Premier League.

Most wanted... Camavinga

COACH

Julien Stephan
Masterminded a Europa League win v Arsenal in 2018-19 before guiding Rennes to French Cup glory.

KEY MAN

Eduardo Camavinga
Teenage box-to-box sensation. Recently became France's youngest player in a century.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Jeremy Doku
18-year-old Belgian likened in style to PSG star Kylian Mbappe.

What are Rennes' strong suits?
Stephan has them very well-drilled in their attacking and defensive transitions. They are rock-solid at the back, boasting one of the meanest defences in Ligue 1. A switch to a 4-3-3 has also given them more thrust and variety going forward.

With first-choice goalkeeper Mendy moving to Chelsea, what is Plan B?
Rennes plumped for a similar profile, bringing in Mendy's understudy in the Senegal national team, Gomis. He will not have it all his own way, though. Early this season, veteran Romain Salin, 36, did a fine job standing in for the Mendy. "The best one will play," says Stephan.

SHAKHTAR DONETSK

Eastern Europe's best hope

Shakhtar do not get nearly enough credit for their accomplishments in Europe in recent times. The Miners have reached the Champions League knockout stages twice (2015 and 2018) and have fared well in the Europa League, twice making the semi-finals (2016 and last term). For a club living in exile – fleeing from Donbass in 2016 due to the on-going conflict – playing in Lviv, Kharkiv and now Kiev, they have performed way better than anyone could have expected.

Ukrainian champions in nine of the last 11 years, Shakhtar have not come flying out of the traps for the new domestic season. Luis Castro has been especially dissatisfied with the team's pressing game and unusual lack of compactness.

Naturalised... Junior Moraes

COACH

Luis Castro
Methodical and demanding. Not so long ago, Benfica were thinking of headhunting him.

KEY MAN

Taison
Attacking midfielder, left-winger or second striker, who reserves his best work for the Champions League.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH

Dodo
Attack-conscious Brazilian right-back who has bullet-from-a-gun pace.

Can they live without their Brazilians?
Absolutely not. Brazilian attacking-third flair has been the fuel in the Shakhtar tank for the best part of two decades, featuring such Samba alumni as Willian, Fernandinho, Jadson, Douglas Costa and Bernard. It's still the formula today, with Taison, Marlos, Alan Patrick and Tete feeding lone striker Junior Moraes.

What about their Ukrainian talent?
Keeper and skipper Andriy Pyatov is a superb last line of defence. Aged 35, he is a key figure for the national team and imminently set to reach the 100-cap barrier. Left-back Viktor Korniyenko, who has just been promoted to the first team, looks to have a bright future as well.

The outsiders

CLUB BRUGGE

Belgium's sole representatives on a high

The *Blauw-Zwart* (Blue-Blacks), Belgium's reigning champions, will go into their latest European adventure in great spirits. A recent 3-0 victory over arch-rivals Anderlecht was the perfect tonic for all at Club and just to improve the mood at the Jan Breydel Stadium, key midfielder Hans Vanaken announced that he would not be moving to the Premier League. The current Belgian Player of the Year had been mulling over an offer from West Ham. However ultimately chose to stay put, extending his contract until 2025.

What is Club's strongest suit?
Their African connection. Their front line is stuffed with top-quality African stars, notably Senegalese winger Krepin Diatta, his compatriot, striker Youssouph Badji and Nigerian line-leaders Emmanuel Dennis – who hit a brace in a 2-2 draw at Real Madrid last season – and David Okereke. In central defence it's a similar story, with the Ivorian duo of Odilon Kossounou and Simon Deli on patrol.

Belgian Player of the Year...Vanaken

COACH
Philippe Clement
Clement is regarded as the best tactician and team-builder in the country. He has been in a state of grace in the last two seasons, steering Genk to the league title, then repeating the achievement with Club Brugge.

KEY MAN
Hans Vanaken
Unusually tall for an attacking midfielder, but so, so effective, piling up goals and assists in wholesale quantities.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Odilon Kossounou
Powerful stopper, who plays with great maturity aged only 19. Joined last year from Hammarby.

DYNAMO KIEV

Fallen giants in need of resurrection

The glory days when Kiev ruled the roost in the old USSR, an independent Ukraine and Europe – winning the Cup-winners Cup in 1974-75 and 1985-86 – are long gone. Shakhtar have usurped them as the domestic No.1 and in the Champions League, they have only qualified once for the knockout stage in the last decade. Now for an optimistic note. In newly-appointed coach Mircea Lucescu, they have a figurehead of infinite top-level experience and tactical guile a plenty. Lucescu, 75, has few peers when it comes to putting together a strategy to neutralise opposition strong points.

Who is Dynamo's best young talent?
Striker Vladyslav Supriaha is their golden boy, rumoured to be a target for several western European big-hitters. Tall, hard to knock off the ball, technically gifted, a calm finisher and altogether much more than a penalty-box poacher. He can work the channels, hold the ball up and drop deep to serve as a playmaker too.

Big prospect... Tsyhankov

COACH
Mircea Lucescu
Much-travelled Romanian, who in a career spanning 40 years has worked in his native land, Italy, Ukraine, Turkey and Russia.

KEY MAN
Viktor Tsyhankov
Ukraine's most exciting prospect for many a year. Employed in the "hole" or as an inverted winger, he guarantees silky technique and vision.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Vitaliy Mykolenko
Polished 21-year-old left-back, who is already established in Ukraine's national team. Can also play equally comfortably as a centre-back.

FERENCVAROS

Celtic's conquerors to cause more upsets?

The Budapest club used to be no mean Euro performers, winning the Fairs Cup – the forerunner of the Europa League – in 1964-65. The "Fradi" side of the '60s and '70s even featured one of the great forwards of all time in Florian Albert – European Player of the Year in 1967. It's been downhill most of the way since, but they are finally back in the big time.

What are Rebrov's coaching methods?
In many ways, he coaches like he played – putting a premium on intelligence and mobility. In an attacking sense, they are a mirror image of Rebrov, featuring small, quick forwards who are creative on the flanks and shuttle between the lines.

Celtic destroyer... Tokmac Nguen (left) celebrates

COACH
Serhiy Rebrov
Coach since August 2018 and the man behind their return to the top table.

KEY MAN
Tokmac Nguen
Forward whose pace and runs are vital to the Magyar champs. Hit the winner in the qualifiers v Celtic.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Oleksandr Zubkov
A classic winger, the Ukrainian has top-level dribbling ability.

ISTANBUL BASAKSEHIR

Debutants may struggle to step up

Basaksehir sent out a clear message of defiance last season by becoming the first team in a decade to break the Super Lig stranglehold of the nation's "Big Three" (Besiktas, Fenerbahce and Galatasaray). Maybe they celebrated a little too much on the west bank of the Bosphorus – they have so far started the 2020-21 Super Lig season extremely poorly.

In which areas must they improve?
They have to learn how to function at a higher tempo. In the Super Lig, they can get away with a slower, more calculated style of play. Their principal problem is the advanced age of their squad (over 30). They do lack vitality and fresh legs.

Talisman... Visca (right)

COACH
Okan Buruk
Led the Basaksehir outfit to the title in his first season in charge. Encourages expansive play.

KEY MAN
Edin Visca
Popular Bosnian midfielder, who has been pulling the strings for nine years.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Berkay Ozcan
Inventive 23-year-old German-born attacking midfielder with a big future.

KRASNODAR

Southern Russians hope to make their mark

The Bulls did very well indeed to secure a third-place finish in Russian last term. For much of the season, their treatment room was over-subscribed. Swedish winger Viktor Claesson and French playmaker Remy Cabella missed much of the campaign after tearing cruciate ligaments, while striker Ari and midfielders Yuriy Gazinskiy and Ruslan Kambolov also had lengthy spells out. All are now fit again.

Will Krasnodar be more cautious?
Maybe, though it's never been part of the Musayev plan to be excessively prudent. In marked contrast to most Russian sides, Krasnodar like to boss possession. They look to keep the ball circulating, create overloads, then spring into attacking life.

Yuriy Gazinskiy... Midfield general

COACH
Murad Musayev
Promoted in April 2018 after running the academy for seven years.

KEY MAN
Yuriy Gazinskiy
Krasnodar always play with more fluidity when central midfielder Gazinskiy is on the field.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Matvey Safonov
Exceptional 21-year-old shot-stopper and penalty area voice of authority.

The outsiders

LOKOMOTIV MOSCOW

Lokomotiv flying the flag for Moscow

Logic says that The Railwaymen will find it hard to make any sort of impression in the Champions League. Marko Nikolic, who took over from legendary boss Yuri Semin in May, has not often lost in his time in charge, but will be dissatisfied with the team's frequent failure to turn matchday superiority into victories. Both the systems he has used thus far – a 4-2-3-1 or 4-4-2 – have looked short of synchronicity. Collectively they remain a work in progress, which could turn out to be fatal against the continental elite.

Will Lokomotiv fans be pleased with the club's transfer activity?
No, they will feel more than a little fearful. They've lost a great deal of experience with Germany centre-back Benedikt Howedes retiring, key midfield link-man Joao Mario returning to Inter after a loan spell and maverick Peruvian forward Jefferson Farfan given his release papers. In a further blow, attacking midfielder, Aleksey Miranchuk, 24, left for Atalanta.

Smolov...Back and with a point to prove

COACH
Marko Nikolic
Serb, whose previous stations include Vojvodina and Partizan Belgrade in his homeland, Olympija Ljubljana in Slovenia and Hungarian outfit Fehervar.

KEY MAN
Fedor Smolov
Russian international striker now back with Lokomotiv after a spell on loan in La Liga with Celta Vigo. Scored v Barcelona and Real Madrid in 2019-20.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Jasurbek Jaloliddinov
Teenage Uzbek dribbling machine (ex-Bunyodkor) with a superb left foot.

MIDTJYLLAND

Minnows with big dreams

Recently crowned Danish champions for the third time in six years, the Jutland club are chomping at the bit after securing their first Champions League qualification. And no one can say they do not fully deserve it. All the teams they had to beat to arrive here (Bulgaria's Ludogorets, Young Boys of Berne and Slavia Prague) have participated in the Champions League in recent times and arguably are better resourced. They are reaping the benefits of their data-driven approach to scouting for inexpensive players.

What are Priske's main priorities?
His No.1 aim is to have a "defence of iron". He especially wants a strong core to his back four and he has that in spades with centre-backs Alexander Scholz and skipper Erik Sviatchenko (ex-Celtic). The pair have received rave reviews in the past few months. In his preferred 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3, Priske insists on a compact shape and everyone springing into pressing mode as soon as the ball is lost.

One to watch... Anwer Mabil

COACH
Brian Priske
Now in his second season in charge of Midtjylland. Has Champions League experience as an assistant coach to Staale Solbakken at FC Copenhagen in 2016-17.

KEY MAN
Awer Mabil
Elusive Australian international winger of South Sudanese descent. Moved to Midtjylland from Adelaide United back in 2015.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Evander
Much-coveted Brazilian attacking midfielder reported to be on the radar of a lot of teams in France and Belgium.

OLYMPIAKOS

Greek champs in need of a better showing

Last season proved to be a wonderful exercise for fans of the *Erythrolefki*. They strolled to their first Greek Super League title in three years, lifted the domestic cup and enjoyed themselves in Europe too, memorably seeing off Arsenal in a last 16 Europa League tie. In their last seven Champions League campaigns, however, they have only reached the last 16 once.

How did they replace full-backs Elabdellaoui and Tsimikas?
In a short-term move, they went the oldie route, recruiting 36-year-old ex-Greece left-back Jose Holebas from Watford and right-back Rafinha (ex-Flamengo and Bayern), who is only 12 months younger.

Man mountain... Pape Abou Cisse

COACH
Pedro Martins
Fearless Portuguese coach, who always wants his side to play on the front foot.

KEY MAN
Jose Sa
Imperious keeper who kept 30 clean sheets in all comps in 2019-20.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Mady Camara
Guinea midfielder with Premier League, Bundesliga and Serie A teams on his trail.

RB SALZBURG

Still striving after loss of attacking trident

The Austrian champions have lost an inordinate amount of attacking brilliance in the past 12 months – Erling Haaland, Takumi Minamino and Hwang Hee-chan. Such a substantial loss of ability would have blunted the cutting edge of many clubs. Yet under the stewardship of US coach Jesse Marsch, they still continue to go forward with flair, menace and verve.

Who are Salzburg's newcomers?
The only acquisition of note was defender Oumar Solet, 20, whom they bought for €4.5m from Lyon. The France U20 ace suffered a cruciate ligament injury late last year but, following extensive physical examinations, Salzburg decided to swoop.

Net-buster... Patson Daka

COACH
Jesse Marsch
May well find himself headhunted soon. Along with Alphonso Davies, he is the face of North American soccer right now.

KEY MAN
Patson Daka
Zambian marksman who hit 27 goals in all comps last season.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Sekou Koita
Promising Mali striker who shone at the U20 World Cup in 2019.

ZENIT

Semak revitalising Russian champions

Over the last four years, Russian champs Zenit mainly had to make do with the bread and water of the Europa League. Last term, they were at last re-acquainted with Champions League caviar, but found it hard to digest, finishing bottom of their group behind Leipzig, Lyon and Benfica. Coach Sergei Semak may have the finger pointed at him if Zenit flop again.

Can Malcolm resurrect his fortunes?
The €40m man was sidelined for several months last season with a hip injury, and he missed the entire Champions League campaign. Now back fit, Semak may use him as a No.10 behind twin-strikers Artem Dzyuba and Sardar Azmoun. All depends on the Brazilian's desire for redemption.

Target man... Artem Dzyuba

COACH
Sergei Semak
Replaced Roberto Mancini in 2018. Astute tactically and very intelligent in his man-management.

KEY MAN
Dejan Lovren
The Croatian has a tough job replacing former back-line rock Branislav Ivanovic.

YOUNGSTER TO WATCH
Danil Krugovoy
Douglas Santos has switched to the centre to make room for the attacking left-back.

Europa League fixtures

GROUP A

OCT 22	CSKA Sofia v Cluj
OCT 22	Young Boys v Roma
OCT 29	Cluj v Young Boys
OCT 29	Roma v CSKA Sofia
NOV 5	Roma v Cluj
NOV 5	Young Boys v CSKA Sofia
NOV 26	CSKA Sofia v Young Boys
NOV 26	Cluj v Roma
DEC 3	Cluj v CSKA Sofia
DEC 3	Roma v Young Boys
DEC 10	CSKA Sofia v Roma
DEC 10	Young Boys v Cluj

Opener...Arsenal face a trip to Rapid Vienna

GROUP B

OCT 22	Dundalk v Molde
OCT 22	Rapid Vienna v Arsenal
OCT 29	Molde v Rapid Vienna
OCT 29	Arsenal v Dundalk
NOV 5	Rapid Vienna v Dundalk
NOV 5	Arsenal v Molde
NOV 26	Molde v Arsenal
NOV 26	Dundalk v Rapid Vienna
DEC 3	Molde v Dundalk
DEC 3	Arsenal v Rapid Vienna
DEC 10	Dundalk v Arsenal
DEC 10	Rapid Vienna v Molde

Celebrations... Bayer Leverkusen are in Group C

GROUP C

OCT 22	Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Slavia Prague
OCT 22	Bayer Leverkusen v Nice
OCT 29	Nice v Hapoel Be'er Sheva
OCT 29	Slavia Prague v Bayer Leverkusen
NOV 5	Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Bayer Leverkusen
NOV 5	Slavia Prague v Nice
NOV 26	Nice v Slavia Prague
NOV 26	Bayer Leverkusen v Hapoel Be'er Sheva
DEC 3	Slavia Prague v Hapoel Be'er Sheva
DEC 3	Nice v Bayer Leverkusen
DEC 10	Bayer Leverkusen v Slavia Prague
DEC 10	Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Nice

GROUP D

OCT 22	Standard Liege v Rangers
OCT 22	Lech Poznan v Benfica
OCT 29	Rangers v Lech Poznan
OCT 29	Benfica v Standard Liege
NOV 5	Lech Poznan v Standard Liege
NOV 5	Benfica v Rangers
NOV 26	Standard Liege v Lech Poznan
NOV 26	Rangers v Benfica
DEC 3	Rangers v Standard Liege
DEC 3	Benfica v Lech Poznan
DEC 10	Standard Liege v Benfica
DEC 10	Lech Poznan v Rangers

GROUP E

OCT 22	PAOK v Omonia Nicosia
OCT 22	PSV v Granada
OCT 29	Omonia Nicosia v PSV
OCT 29	Granada v PAOK
NOV 5	PAOK v PSV
NOV 5	Omonia Nicosia v Granada
NOV 26	PSV v PAOK
NOV 26	Granada v Omonia Nicosia
DEC 3	Granada v PSV
DEC 3	Omonia Nicosia v PAOK
DEC 10	PSV v Omonia Nicosia
DEC 10	PAOK v Granada

Challengers...Napoli take on AZ Alkmaar in the opening game

GROUP F

OCT 22	Napoli v AZ Alkmaar
OCT 22	Rijeka v Real Sociedad
OCT 29	Real Sociedad v Napoli
OCT 29	AZ Alkmaar v Rijeka
NOV 5	Real Sociedad v AZ Alkmaar
NOV 5	Rijeka v Napoli
NOV 26	Napoli v Rijeka
NOV 26	AZ Alkmaar v Real Sociedad
DEC 3	AZ Alkmaar v Napoli
DEC 3	Real Sociedad v Rijeka
DEC 10	Rijeka v AZ Alkmaar
DEC 10	Napoli v Real Sociedad

GROUP G

OCT 22	Braga v AEK Athens
OCT 22	Leicester City v Zorya Luhansk
OCT 29	AEK Athens v Leicester City
OCT 29	Zorya Luhansk v Braga
NOV 5	Leicester City v Braga
NOV 5	Zorya Luhansk v AEK Athens
NOV 26	AEK Athens v Zorya Luhansk
NOV 26	Braga v Leicester City
DEC 3	Zorya Luhansk v Leicester City
DEC 3	AEK Athens v Braga
DEC 10	Braga v Zorya Luhansk
DEC 10	Leicester City v AEK Athens

Celtic awaits.... Milan goal machine Zlatan Ibrahimovic

GROUP H

OCT 22	Sparta Prague v Lille
OCT 22	Celtic v Milan
OCT 29	Milan v Sparta Prague
OCT 29	Lille v Celtic
NOV 5	Milan v Lille
NOV 5	Celtic v Sparta Prague
NOV 26	Lille v Milan
NOV 26	Sparta Prague v Celtic
DEC 3	Milan v Celtic
DEC 3	Lille v Sparta Prague
DEC 10	Sparta Prague v Milan
DEC 10	Celtic v Lille

GROUP I

OCT 22	Villarreal v Sivasspor
OCT 22	Maccabi Tel-Aviv v Qarabag
OCT 29	Qarabag v Villarreal
OCT 29	Sivasspor v Maccabi Tel-Aviv
NOV 5	Sivasspor v Qarabag
NOV 5	Villarreal v Maccabi Tel-Aviv
NOV 26	Maccabi Tel-Aviv v Villarreal
NOV 26	Qarabag v Sivasspor
DEC 3	Sivasspor v Villarreal
DEC 3	Qarabag v Maccabi Tel-Aviv
DEC 10	Maccabi Tel-Aviv v Sivasspor
DEC 10	Villarreal v Qarabag

GROUP J

OCT 22	Ludogorets v Antwerp
OCT 22	Tottenham v LASK
OCT 29	LASK v Ludogorets
OCT 29	Antwerp v Tottenham
NOV 5	Ludogorets v Tottenham
NOV 5	Antwerp v LASK
NOV 26	LASK v Antwerp
NOV 26	Tottenham v Ludogorets
DEC 3	LASK v Tottenham
DEC 3	Antwerp v Ludogorets
DEC 10	Ludogorets v LASK
DEC 10	Tottenham v Antwerp

GROUP K

OCT 22	Wolfsberger v CSKA Moscow
OCT 22	Dinamo Zagreb v Feyenoord
OCT 29	CSKA Moscow v Dinamo Zagreb
OCT 29	Feyenoord v Wolfsberger
NOV 5	Dinamo Zagreb v Wolfsberger
NOV 5	Feyenoord v CSKA Moscow
NOV 26	CSKA Moscow v Feyenoord
NOV 26	Wolfsberger v Dinamo Zagreb
DEC 3	CSKA Moscow v Wolfsberger
DEC 3	Feyenoord v Dinamo Zagreb
DEC 10	Dinamo Zagreb v CSKA Moscow
DEC 10	Wolfsberger v Feyenoord

GROUP L

OCT 22	Hoffenheim v Red Star Belgrade
OCT 22	Slovan Liberec v Gent
OCT 29	Red Star Belgrade v Slovan Liberec
OCT 29	Gent v Hoffenheim
NOV 5	Hoffenheim v Slovan Liberec
NOV 5	Red Star Belgrade v Gent
NOV 26	Slovan Liberec v Hoffenheim
NOV 26	Gent v Red Star Belgrade
DEC 3	Gent v Slovan Liberec
DEC 3	Red Star Belgrade v Hoffenheim
DEC 10	Hoffenheim v Gent
DEC 10	Slovan Liberec v Red Star Belgrade

End of an era

Jamie Evans looks at the leading contenders in this season's Europa League

Rivals...Tottenham and Arsenal are favourites for the iconic trophy

The Europa League as we know it is coming to an end.

This season's competition will be the last in its current format, with UEFA's Europa Conference League set to begin in 2021-22. The hope is that this will improve Europe's secondary competition, mainly by reducing the number of teams in the group stage from 48 to 32. From next season, group winners will advance directly to the last 16, while runners-up will have to play an extra round alongside the third-placed Champions League sides to join them.

Until then, the bloated group stage begins again. As with every other major competition, this condensed, COVID-affected campaign is likely to throw up some surprising results. By the time the knockout stages begin in February, the list of candidates to lift the trophy may look quite different, but nevertheless there are already several teams that will expect to be there.

In form...Napoli's Dries Mertens

FAVOURITES

According to the bookmakers, the trophy is most likely to end up in North London, with both **Arsenal** and **Tottenham** possessing impressive credentials.

The Gunners have started well in Mikel Arteta's first full season, with a commitment to play out from the back that is likely to improve as the season continues. They are also led by arguably the best goalscorer in the competition, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang. In his last three Europa League campaigns, the 31-year-old has scored 19 goals, including eight when Arsenal reached the 2019 final.

In Spurs' corner, they have Jose Mourinho, a manager with a 100 per cent winning record in this competition. A champion in his two previous Europa League campaigns, first with Porto in 2002-03 and then again with Manchester United in 2016-17, Mourinho has assembled a team far more to his suiting than when he first arrived: a front three of pace, strength and match-winning ability, a midfield destroyer in Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, and a well-organised defensive unit.

It could also be argued that the competitiveness of the Premier League gives English sides extra motivation to win this competition: the Europa League could well be their best route into the Champions League.

Another side with their hearts set on a return to Champions League football is **Milan**. The Italian giants have been in impressive form under Stefano Pioli in 2020, picking up where they left off at the end of last season by winning their first three Serie A games of 2020-21 without conceding a goal in their quest to return to Italy's top four.

On a similar mission are **Napoli**, who suffered their worst league finish in a decade last season. The early signs are promising for last year's Coppa Italia winners though, having thrashed Genoa 6-0 in their second game of the season. Star of the show that day was Belgium's Dries Mertens, with the 33-year-old determined to prove that he is still top dog in Naples following the arrival of €60m man Victor Osimhen.

Since the competition was rebranded from the UEFA Cup in 2009, the trophy has ended up in Spain seven times. Overseeing three of those was Unai Emery, winning back-to-back finals from 2014 to 2016, before reaching the 2019 final with Arsenal. Now in charge of **Villarreal**, Emery is trying to rebuild his reputation after struggling in the Premier League. After finishing fifth in La Liga last season, the Yellow Submarine have made up for the loss of Santi Cazorla by adding Dani Parejo and Francis Coquelin. The experienced coach will make his team tough to beat, while the front two of Gerard Moreno and Paco Alcacer have started strongly.

Dark horses...Lille have an exciting young squad

IN CONTENTION

By the time the final comes around in May, the curse of Bela Guttmann will be almost 60 years old. The last man to lead Benfica to a European trophy famously declared: "Not in a hundred years from now will **Benfica** ever be European champions again," and so far he has been right. No side has lost more European finals, most recently in back-to-back Europa League finals against Chelsea in 2013 and Sevilla in 2014.

The man in charge of those defeats was Jorge Jesus, who returned to the club in August having won the Copa Libertadores with Flamengo. After a busy summer, he may well be optimistic of ending the curse. Outstanding young centre-back Ruben Dias has been replaced by experienced duo Nicolas Otamendi and Jan Vertonghen, with forwards Luca Waldschmidt, Darwin Nunez and Everton also arriving to give Benfica a squad of both know-how and talent.

How **Leicester City** approach the competition will be intriguing. Premier League sides often struggle to strike a balance between the Europa League and their domestic commitments, yet Brendan Rodgers has built a squad of genuine depth. Playing in Europe for the first time since reaching the Champions League quarter-finals in 2016-17, the Foxes must be considered contenders.

Curse-ender... Benfica coach Jorge Jesus

Bayer Leverkusen and **Roma** will also expect to reach the latter stages, although whether their reconfigured attacks can take them all the way remains to be seen. The Germans have signed Patrik Schick to replace last season's top scorers, Kai Havertz and Kevin Volland, while the Italian side have added a wealth of experience in the form of Pedro (Chelsea) and Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Arsenal).

DARK HORSES

The two other Spanish sides in this season's group stage will also be worth watching. **Real Sociedad** impressed by finishing sixth in La Liga, and the vast experience of David Silva will more than make up for the loss of star man Martin Odegaard, who returned to Real Madrid following his impressive loan.

Granada, meanwhile, were an even bigger surprise package in last season's La Liga, finishing level on points with Sociedad. Although they have retained their impressive Venezuelan stars Darwin Machis and Yangel Herrera (on loan from Manchester City), last season's top scorer Carlos Fernandez has returned to Sevilla.

There will be hope for German side **Hoffenheim**, who qualified for the competition with a 4-0 victory over Borussia Dortmund on the final day of last season, and are managed by Sebastian Hoeness. The 38-year-old has been a coach in Bayern Munich's academy for the last three years, but will hope to follow in the footsteps of Julian Nagelsmann, the hugely promising RB Leipzig head coach, who made his name at Hoffenheim.

In the last 24 years, Marseille are the only French side to reach the final, but that could change this year. **Lille** have handled the loss of Victor Osimhen and Gabriel Magalhaes as well as could be expected, quickly replacing them with Canada goal machine Jonathan David and Dutch defender Sven Botman. The rest of the squad that finished fourth in Ligue 1 has largely remained intact, and is packed with potential.

Looking beyond the big leagues, two-time winners **Feyenoord** have made an encouraging start to the season thanks to the exceptional form of skipper Steven Berghuis. In Serbia, **Red Star Belgrade** are on course for their fourth league title in a row having won their first ten matches of the season. Having to play in an empty stadium, however, will significantly reduce the fear factor for visitors to Belgrade.

Playmaker... David Silva

8 Europa League players to watch

Jamie Evans highlights the stars you need to keep an eye on in this season's Europa League

1 Bukayo SAKA

ARSENAL

It was in last season's Europa League that Saka truly made his name. Nobody claimed more assists in the competition than the teenager (five), while his displays as a makeshift left-back have been equally impressive.

This season he will be one of Arsenal's established stars rather than an emerging talent, so may even be rested during the group stage. But assuming the Gunners advance, Saka has the chance to prove why he is one of Europe's most exciting prospects. England boss Gareth Southgate, who handed Saka his senior Three Lions debut in October, will be watching closely.

2 Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC

MILAN

Age creeps up on everyone eventually. Everyone, that is, except Ibrahimovic. Now 39, it is tempting to ask how long the Swede has left at the top, but then again, looking at his form and incredible physical condition, it may yet be some way off.

Milan's squad can be characterised as one of youthful exuberance and talent, yet their main man is still the veteran striker: his wealth of experience makes him the perfect leader for the likes of Sandro Tonali, Jens Petter Hauge and Daniel Maldini, while his goalscoring record remains impeccable, with 12 goals in his first 19 Serie A games since returning to Milan in January.

3 Jamie VARDY

LEICESTER CITY

While Zlatan has played over 150 games in Europe, this will be Vardy's first time in the Europa League. To some continental defenders, the 33-year-old may even be something of an unknown quantity – but that is sure to change once they've faced him: Vardy is still a nightmare to play against.

The ex-England striker has hit 40 goals against the Premier League's "big six," and his Golden Boot-winning form from last season has continued into the new campaign.

4 Marash KUMBULLA

ROMA

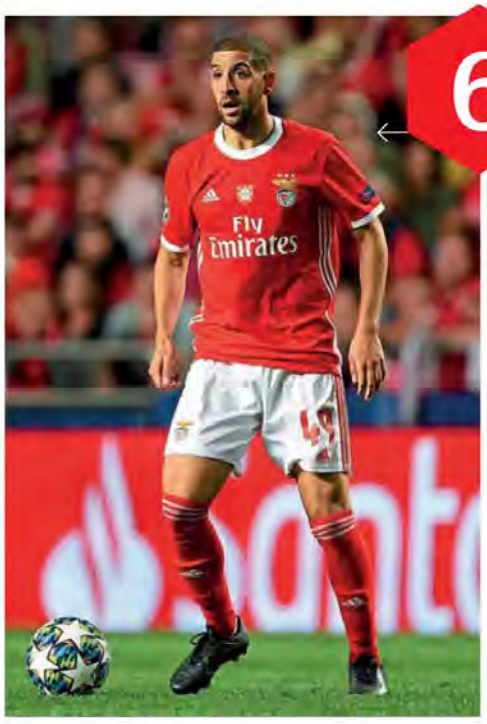
Kumbulla has been a *World Soccer* regular recently, impressing for Verona. In the summer, Roma won the race to sign him, giving him the chance to showcase his ability to the rest of Europe. Quick, strong and a fierce competitor, the Albania defender has so far been stationed on the left of a back three in Rome.

5 Samuel CHUKWUEZE

VILLARREAL

Landing Japanese flyer Takefusa Kubo on loan from Real Madrid was an eye-catching summer signing for Villarreal, yet Chukwueze remains the most exciting young winger at El Madrigal.

The Nigeria starlet was only 19 when the Spanish side reached the Europa League quarter-finals in 2018-19, yet caught the eye with his direct dribbling, quick feet and turn of pace. Two years on and although he is still just as fun to watch, he is yet to add the end product to his game that would turn him from a super sub into a guaranteed starter. Perhaps this will be his season.



6 Adel TAARABT

BENFICA

QPR fans could be forgiven for failing to recognise Taarabt as the player that inspired them to the Championship title in 2010-11. Back then, the Morocco midfielder was a mercurial No.10 with zero defensive instincts. "We banned him from coming in our half...and would fine him if he did," his then manager Neil Warnock recently told *Sky Sports*.

Since breaking into the Benfica side in 2019, however, Taarabt has been transformed. These days, he is more likely to end a mazy dribble with a crunching tackle than embark on one himself, while he still possesses the flair to produce magic with the ball from deep.

7 Jonathan IKONE

LILLE

In recent seasons Lille have sold Nicolas Pepe and Victor Osimhen for huge profit. Their current squad is packed with talent too, with the likes of Jonathan Bamba, Renato Sanches, Boubakary Soumare and Isaac Lihadji, but Ikone is their stand-out star.

The France atacking midfielder is another huge talent from PSG's academy to leave Paris in search of first team football, and the French champions may well be kicking themselves once again.

8 Florian WIRTZ

BAYER LEVERKUSEN

Leverkusen could afford to be relaxed about selling Kai Havertz, knowing that they already have Germany's next wonderkid.

Wirtz's record-breaking emergence has been well documented, becoming the Bundesliga's youngest-ever goalscorer in June, and the departure of Havertz will thrust him even further into the spotlight. Capable of playing anywhere in the midfield, the 17-year-old will play his part if Leverkusen are to advance to the latter stages.

CHANGING SIDES

Steve Menary examines the changes to FIFA's international eligibility criteria

Players have been switching nationalities for decades but until now, that decision had to be taken early on.

In bigger countries, players who had risen through the junior ranks were left ruing that decision, as they were squeezed out after winning the odd senior cap and became lost to the international game.

Using the rule that allows using your grandparents as a qualification, some of these disenfranchised players could have switched to smaller countries and had long international careers, but not if they had a senior cap in a competitive game.

As a result, FIFA has intervened. Any player aged below 21 and with no more than three senior caps can now switch nationality. This includes competitive matches, although not appearances at major tournaments.

"The rule change is very good; it gives options," says Tom Saintfiet, the Belgian coach of The Gambia. "This makes it easy for players to make a choice in the beginning of their career and not have second doubts or bad feeling afterwards.

Switch... Wilfried Zaha made his England debut in 2012 before switching to Ivory Coast

Tug-of-war... Mariano Diaz

"I am in touch with several dual-citizen players. They wanted to wait as long as possible to play for the bigger country but because of this rule they can still play for the smaller country early and then switch to the bigger country afterwards if the chance comes."

Many countries with a colonial heritage have already been mining their diaspora. Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau qualified for continental finals with players from former colonial masters Portugal, while an influx of UK-based players helped propel Jamaica to the 1998 World Cup finals.

But foreign players are not an immediate panacea for success.

"You have to find that fine line," says Jacques Passy, the Mexican coach of the Dominican Republic. "Playing in a better league does not mean that players will benefit the team. Not having the right attitude can mean the player brings a disadvantage.

"It becomes critically important to understand which players have the right mentality."

Passy was previously coach of St. Kitts & Nevis, whose UK-based scout, Lincoln Moses, has unearthed dozens of players, including West Bromwich Albion's Birmingham-born midfielder Romaine Sawyers.

"I was on standby for England but it was not really an option," says Sawyers. "I also qualify for Jamaica and Costa Rica through my grandparents, so if it's a decision over which one is likely to get to the World Cup, then it's Costa Rica. St. Kitts was probably last, but I knew what it meant to the family and it meant the most. I've never regretted it once."

Sawyers has had a positive impact in his 26 caps, but some players do not have the same feeling for the land of their ancestors.

Controversial...Diego Costa switched from Brazil to Spain ahead of World Cup 2014

"What national teams can get without a properly managed recruitment department is the risk of young players going to play for the country of say their grandparents for the wrong reasons, using the call-ups for a jolly up, and costing the team's time, money and game time," says former player agent turned international head scout, Faizal Khan.

Khan, who helped find Neil Danns, Callum Harriott and Terell Ondaan for his native Guyana and Jodi Jones for Malta, broadly welcomes the move but warns of a downside.

Any player aged below 21 and with no more than three senior caps can now switch nationality

"It's not necessarily a good thing for the smaller nations, because if a smaller nation has a top young star, that youngster could potentially be persuaded to stop playing for the smaller nation in the hope of holding out for a bigger nation, for example if they have a professional contract overseas."

Real Madrid striker Mariano Diaz is a prime example of this. Diaz grew up in Spain but made his debut for the Dominican Republic – the country of his mother – in a friendly against Haiti in 2013. He has not played for them since.

In 2017, Spain's then manager Julen Lopetegui said he was monitoring the striker, but no call-up has emerged and Diaz appears lost to international football in both Europe and the Caribbean.

After finally loosening up the eligibility rules, FIFA will be hoping that these sorts of stories are exceptions rather than a burgeoning trend.

TEN PLAYERS TO SWITCH NATIONALITY

Alfredo Di Stefano
Argentina to Colombia, Colombia to Spain

Christian Benteke
DR Congo to Belgium

Deco
Brazil to Portugal

Diego Costa
Brazil to Spain

Eusebio
Mozambique to Portugal

Ivan Rakitic
Switzerland to Croatia

Kevin-Prince Boateng
Germany to Ghana

Miralem Pjanic
Luxembourg to Bosnia & Herzegovina

Riyad Mahrez
France to Algeria

Wilfried Zaha
Ivory Coast to England, England to Ivory Coast

Steve Menary

Brothers...Jerome and Kevin-Prince Boateng played against each other at Brazil 2014

Glenn Moore

The place to be

WSL set to replace NWSL as the world's top female football league

It was a shot to make any marketing executive swoon and Tottenham Hotspur made sure plenty of eyeballs saw it. There was Alex Morgan, on her first day in training, chatting with Jose Mourinho like they were old friends.

This clip featured prominently in publicity produced by Spurs' media department and no wonder. Morgan, the best-known footballer, male or female, in the world's wealthiest country, has 9.2 million Instagram followers – more than her new club does. Her arrival at Tottenham, like those of Mourinho, Gareth Bale and the *Amazon* cameras, is all part of the drive to make Spurs a global powerhouse.

But it was also a significant move outside North London. Morgan became the fifth member of the victorious US World Cup team to join the FA Women's Super League after the arrivals of Rose Lavelle and Sam Mewis at Manchester City, and Tobin Heath and Christen Press at Manchester United. Add four members of the Dutch team the US beat in the final, an influx of Australians led by Sam Kerr, a cluster of Germany, France and Norway internationals, and Chelsea's recruitment of Pernille Harder, and the WSL suddenly looks a stronger league than America's NWSL.

There are special circumstances. Coronavirus has shredded the NWSL schedule and put the 2020 Olympics back a year. US players, and others who normally play NWSL, need matches and only Europe is offering a competitive fixture list. However, this may just have accelerated a shift in power that increasingly looks inevitable.

For decades women's football in the States benefited from the fact that the men's game there has a limited heritage. Without the misogyny and chauvinism that kept the women's game suppressed for so long in Europe (excluding Scandinavia) the women's game flourished – up to a point (two NWSL predecessors went bust).

However, now Europe's men's clubs are finally investing in the women's game, the sport's deep historical roots and the clubs' huge riches are transforming the landscape. Nowhere is this more apparent than in England, where the WSL has followed the model of the Premier League to become an international competition.

When the WSL kicked off this season there were 20 non-UK nations represented. Ninety-four of the 271 players came from outside the British Isles (34%) with only 141 eligible for England (52%). There is a degree of concern about this and the FA are bringing in a homegrown rule similar to that used within the Premier League to ensure England coaches have a sufficiently deep talent pool, but there is no philosophical objection to the league's globalisation. On the contrary, as with the Premier League, it is seen as a selling point.

Even before Morgan signed, the FA were able to announce a 50-match deal with US TV network NBC signed in the wake of her compatriots' arrival.

> "This is going to be the best league in the world… All the top players now want to play in England"
>
> Kelly Smith

A similar agreement was struck for Canada (who have four players in the WSL). That brought the number of overseas nations showing WSL matches to 18, including Germany, Italy, Australia, Mexico and Scandinavia. Fans living in countries without a deal can watch on the FA Player, a streaming service run by the FA. The WSL has become the league players want to play in, and the league fans want to watch.

"The WSL is making a name for itself as one of the top leagues in the world and I want to become a part of that history," says Morgan. "I've heard so many great things. There's been some huge signings in recent years. Some of my US team-mates have come over and I had positive feedback from them."

US Imports… Tobin Heath of Manchester United and Manchester City's Rose Lavelle

Welcome… Morgan chats to Spurs manager Jose Mourinho

One of those is Tobin Heath who said: "I remember saying when Manchester United came into the league, "Wow, this is huge. This is huge for a club like this to have a women's team." It's so important for clubs with all this tradition and history, power, influence – we see it in America all the time, how much the badge and the club means. It's so encouraging for the global game at large. We need more of this, and I'm happy to be part of it."

Kelly Smith, the best female player England have produced, who retired in 2017, spent much of her career playing in the US as that was the place to be. She said: "Our young players now do not have to go to the US, this is going to be the best league in the world with the level of play, the top coaches we have, the resources, the money being put into

Marquee signing... Alex Morgan

the game. All the top players now want to play in England."

Australian Steph Catley, who joined Arsenal after six years in the NWSL, concurred. "Right now this is the place where you want to play football because you're coming up against the best players in the world, week-in, week-out."

WSL's global reach is not complete. There is not, at present, an African player in the league, although there have been a few, notably Nigeria's Asisat Oshoala, now of Barcelona, who played for Liverpool and Arsenal. Nor are there any South Americans, though Ester (Brazil) and Christiane Endler (Chile) previously played for Chelsea. They will come though, drawn by rising wages, the lure of teams affiliated to world-renown Premier League clubs and the chance to play at Wembley and in the Champions League. That is a combination few leagues can match.

PLAYER NATIONALITES IN WSL

141	England
19	Scotland
13	Wales
11	Australia
10	Republic of Ireland, Norway
9	Germany, Netherlands
5	USA, France
4	Northern Ireland, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, South Korea
3	New Zealand, Spain
2	Finland, Austria, Poland
1	Czech Republic, Belgium, Portugal

Round-up

Appointment...Gustavsson with Matildas forward Caitlin Foord

NEW COACH FOR MATILDAS

Tony Gustavsson, who was assistant coach as US won the 2015 and 2019 World Cups and 2012 Olympics, is to become the new coach of Australia. The 47-year-old, who is currently coaching Hammarby in his native Sweden, will take over on January 1. He replaces Ante Milicic who left to take over men's Australian league newcomers Macarthur.

The first target for Gustavsson is next summer's Olympics, but the main focus will be on the 2023 World Cup which is to be jointly-hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

DORTMUND START TEAM

Borussia Dortmund, hitherto the most significant European club without a women's team, are to start one. Like *Revierderby* rivals Schalke, they will begin in the eighth-tier amateur Kreisliga B next season.

Dortmund, who had been criticised by their own fans for not having a female section, acted after polling supporters.

Porto are now the biggest European club without a women's team.

Award winner... Chelsea's Pernille Harder

SAEVIK TO LADY WOLVES

Wolfsburg strengthened after selling Pernille Harder to Chelsea by signing Norway striker Karina Saevik from Paris Saint-Germain. The Lady Wolves had already recruited Pauline Bremer from Manchester City. Elsewhere Everton's Dutch defender Kika van Es returned to Twente and Australia's Jacynta Galabadaarachchi left West Ham for Napoli.

BARCA WIN FIRST CLASICO

La Liga opened with a bang with the first official women's Clasico. Barcelona took

Clasico hero...Barca's Patri Guijarro opens the scoring

the spoils, winning 4-0 in the capital with goals from Patri Guijarro, Lieke Martens, Alexia Putellas and an own goal. The match was Real Madrid's first under their own name having played under the CD Tacon banner last season despite changing ownership in 2019.

CONSOLATION FOR HARDER

Pernille Harder was crowned UEFA Women's Player of the Year, her second success after winning in 2018. On both occasions she reached the Champions League final with Wolfsburg but lost to Lyon. Harder was also voted Forward of the Year but Lyon took the other honours with Jean-Luc Vasseur, Sarah Bouhaddi, Wendie Renard and Dzsenifer Marozsan named Coach, Goalkeeper, Defender and Midfielder of the Year respectively.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE CHANGES

The pandemic forced UEFA to delay and abbreviate the early rounds of the Champions League with the preliminary round mini-tournaments replaced by two single-leg knockout rounds in November. These would cut 40 entrants down to ten qualifiers to join the 22 seeds in the round of 32, which itself was postponed to December.

3-4 Nov: First qualifying round
18-19 Nov: Second qualifying round
8-9 & 15-16 Dec: Round of 32

NEXT MONTH...

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Copa Libertadores...Group stage finally complete

Play-off finals

Nick Bidwell takes a look at the teams hoping to qualify for next summer's European Championship

Hungary v Iceland

Overview

This clash of the Magyars and the Norsemen represents a date with destiny for both combatants. Hungary, once a world football power in the 1950s and '60s before enduring three decades in the wilderness, have their sights set on reaching what will only be their fourth European Championship (previous participations in 1964, 1972 and 2016). Iceland, until recently international also-rans, are striving to appear in their third consecutive major tournament after Euro 2016 and the 2018 World Cup. Hungary have an extra incentive to prevail. Should they go forward, they will host two Euro 2020 group phase matches in their Budapest backyard.

Each team features one totally indispensable figure. In the cherry red Hungarian corner, RB Leipzig keeper Peter Gulacsi, rated one of the best custodians in the Bundesliga and always an exceptional shot-blocker. On the opposite side of the ring, Iceland playmaker, Gylfi Sigurdsson, who in an unaccustomed second striker role, scored both his country's goals in the 2-1 victory over Romania in the play-off semi-final. Hungary must take extra care when the Everton attacking midfielder is wthin shooting range.

Key battle

A potentially vital match-up will involve Iceland's right-back Victor Palsson and up-and-coming Hungarian attacking midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai, who missed the semi-final (the Magyars' 3-1 win in Bulgaria) due to COVID-19 quarantine issues at his club Red Bull Salzburg. The latter often ends up drifting to the left, where he can run riot with quick feet and improvisational skills. The onus will be on the warrior-like Palsson to shut down this particular supply line. Interestingly, Palsson has little experience at full-back, normally operating as a defensive midfielder for his second tier German club Darmstadt.

Returning...Hungary's Dominik Szoboszlai

Match-winner... Sigurdsson scores at the 2018 World Cup

Talking point

Neither side are what one might term the complete package. For all of their vast experience and toughness, the long-serving Icelandic centre-back pairing of Kari Arnason, 38, and Ragnar Sigurdsson, 34, are clearly not the most mobile. As for Hungary, their number one problem is at the point of attack, where skipper Adam Szalai appears to be on borrowed time, too cumbersome and slow. Szalai, only a second-stringer at his German side Mainz, has been in dispute with his club over wage payments and recently was suspended.

Northern Ireland v Slovakia

Overview

With both countries reaching this play-off final on the back of passing the penalty shoot-out test, each camp will be convinced that the momentum is with them, that this is their moment. Despite hailing from two distinct football cultures, these two nations have a great deal in common on the field of play: character and desire, gritty resilience under pressure and solid organisation. Here are two sets of players who know how to dig in and battle in adverse circumstances. The respective coaches (Northern Ireland's rookie boss Ian Baraclough and Slovakia's Pavel Hapal) essentially are details men. Baraclough amply demonstrated his scrupulous mind in the semi-final win against Bosnia & Herzegovina, rewarded for bringing on penalty-kick experts Liam Boyce and Conor Washington in the final minute of extra-time. In Northern Ireland's first-ever shoot-out, both substitutes duly converted.

Slovakia, who knocked out the Republic of Ireland in their own penalty shoot-out drama, will take heart from the last time they travelled to Belfast for a competitive fixture, winning 2-0 in a 2010 World Cup qualifier. In four clashes in all, the Slovaks have won two games, with one victory for the Ulsterman and one draw.

Key battle

The outcome of the central midfield face-to-face pitting Slovakia skipper Marek Hamsik against his Northern Irish counterpart Steven Davis could go a long way to deciding the tie. The bulk of Slovakia's creative impulses come through the dancing feet of Hamsik – the country's most-capped player and all-time top goalscorer – while Davis, now plying his trade with Rangers in his fourth spell with the Scottish giants (including loans), is equally vital to the Green and White Army's cause. He is rarely given sufficient credit for his wide skill-set: his ball-winning ability, bravery on the ball and tempo-controlling skills. Davis recently appeared in his 121st international, thus overtaking legendary goalkeeper Pat Jennings as the country's most-capped player.

Penalty king... Dallas scores for Northern Ireland in the semi-final

Playmaker...Marek Hamsik

Talking point

Two of Slovakia's most influential players, Internazionale stopper Milan Skriniar and Napoli midfielder Stanislav Lobotka missed the semi-final win over the Republic of Ireland because of COVID-19 protocols. If the pair are available in Belfast, the Slovak spine will be all the stronger for it. Northern Ireland's number one concern is their lack of a prime-time finisher. The likes of Josh Magennis, Boyce, Washington and Kyle Lafferty are all industrious, willing to go that extra mile, but sadly have their limitations too. Do not be surprised if this goes all the way and ends up being decided by yet another penalty shoot-out showdown.

Serbia v Scotland

Winners...Scotland's players celebrate beating Israel in the semi-finals

Overview

Absent from every major international tournament since the 1998 World Cup finals in France, the Scots have grown used to looking dispassionately in from the outside. Twenty-two years without a sniff of the big-time inevitably has left scars, with the pressure to deliver increasing exponentially after every abortive campaign. Hence the huge sense of relief when they saw off Israel on penalties at the semi-final stage. Without playing particularly well over the 120 minutes, Scotland still managed to keep their heads at the decisive moment. Why wouldn't manager Steve Clarke feel optimistic that a corner has been turned?

Serbia, boosted by a fine team performance in the 2-1 play-off victory in Norway in October, will start the Belgrade showdown as favourites. They will be playing on their own familiar patch and are awash with top quality in the attacking-third. So much so that Lazio star midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic – who came off the bench to score both his side's goals versus Norway – did not even warrant a place in the starting line up. SMS surely will be on from the off on D-Day at the "Marakana" (the Red Star stadium). Supporting Serbia comes complete with a health warning. One moment, they are purposeful and thrilling; the next, disorderly and unfocused.

Key battle

Most games are decided in the muck and sweat of the engine room and in this final, much will depend on the struggle for dominance involving Aston Villa and Tartan Army favourite John McGinn and Serb dynamo Nemanja Gudelj. Not only is McGinn Scotland's best chance of a goal (seven in 25 caps). He also powers forward and does his fair share of dirty work. Gudelj, now based at Sevilla following stints at Ajax, Chinese outfits Tianjin TEDA and Guangzhou Evergrande, and Sporting, looks a player reborn, evidently keen to cover every blade of grass.

Midfield maestro...Serbia's Sergej Milinkovic-Savic

Talking point

Many Scottish pundits remain steadfastly unconvinced by Steve Clarke's decision to switch from a four-man defence to a back three, doubtful whether the Caledonian boss has enough agile, ball-playing defenders for such a system. The Scottish back line tends to sit rather deep, inviting persistent opposition incursions. Serbia coach Ljubisa Tumbakovic also uses a defensive trio, with the highly-experienced captain Aleksandar Kolarov stationed alongside Fiorentina's Nikola Milenkovic and Stefan Mitrovic of Strasbourg.

Georgia v North Macedonia

Dribbler...Giorgi Chakvetadze runs at Egzon Bejtulai of North Macedonia

Overview

Whatever the outcome at the Boris Paichadze stadium in Tbilisi, history will be made, with the European finals welcoming a brand-new contestant. These two countries, independent for less than 30 years, are no strangers to each other on the football stage. Indeed, this final will be their third meeting in just three months, following on from a 1-1 Nations League draw in Tbilisi in September and the return fixture in Skopje in October. Such familiarity – plus, of course, the Holy Grail prize on offer – could well produce a cagey, tense encounter.

North Macedonia coach, Igor Angelovski, who has been in charge for exactly five years, will be aiming to mark the anniversary with a career-defining opus. Some North Macedonia fans complain that his side does not play with enough flair or freedom. But as he proved when leading the team to a great Nations League run in 2018-19 – winning five games out of six to gain promotion from League D to League C – he knows how to get results. Georgia boss Vladimir Weiss already has shown himself to be an expert in expeditions of discovery, leading Slovakia to their very first international tournament (the 2010 World Cup).

Key battle

By common consent his team's most competent defender, Georgia centre-back Solomon Kvirkvelia will have a most delicate mission on his hands, tasked with neutralising wily old North Macedonian second striker and skipper Goran Pandev. The 37-year-old Pandev, still going strong in Italy's Serie A for Genoa, would just love to end his playing days on an Everest-like high at the European finals. Kvirkvelia, 28, has been a Russian Premier League stand-out for the last three or four years, starring for Rubin Kazan, Lokomotiv Moscow and latterly Rotor Volgograd.

Veteran...Goran Pandev

Talking point

Will Vladimir Weiss be brave enough to select both of his young dribbling machines, Rubin Kazan winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Gent attacking midfielder Giorgi Chakvetadze? While Kvaratskhelia figured prominently in the semi-final play-off win over Belarus, Chakvetadze did not even make the bench. In tandem, the pair could cause absolute mayhem.

Meanwhile, Igor Angelovski has something of a goalkeeping dilemma. His usual number one Stole Dimitrievski is currently only a bench-warmer for Spanish second tier club Rayo Vallecano. Napoli and Macedonia midfield gem Eljif Elmas should be available after a positive COVID-19 test.

SEPTEMBER 12-OCTOBER 9, 2020

Global diary

Stories from the four corners of the football world

Saturday September 12

EUROPE: Top-flight football returns to England and Spain with the kick-offs of the 2020-21 Premier League and La Liga seasons.
THAILAND: Domestic action returns to Thailand for the first time in more than six months as the Thai League 1 gets underway.
SOUTH AFRICA: Mamelodi Sundowns complete an historic treble by beating Bloemfontein Celtic 1-0 in the final of South Africa's Nedbank Cup.

Sunday September 13

BRAZIL: Chapecoense are crowned champions of the 2020 Catarinense State Championship after beating Brusque 1-0 (3-0 on aggregate), nearly four years after the plane crash that devastated the club.

Monday September 14

NETHERLANDS: Feyenoord become the latest club to sign up to a behind-the-scenes documentary, which will be shown on Disney+.
ASIA: The AFC Champions League resumes, with reigning champions Al Hilal defeating Pakhtakor of Uzbekistan 2-1 with a 97th-minute winner.

Tuesday September 15

SOUTH AMERICA: The Copa Libertadores restarts six months after it was first postponed by the coronavirus pandemic.
ENGLAND: Jack Grealish signs a new contract at Aston Villa, as does striker and captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang at Arsenal.
SCOTLAND: Anthony Stokes is released by Livingston just four weeks after signing.

Wednesday September 16

ENGLAND: English National League side Macclesfield Town are issued a winding-up order.
ITALY: Juventus boss Andrea Pirlo completes his coaching badges, finishing second in his class.
GERMANY: RB Leipzig contact FIFA, alleging that Leeds United owe them €21 million for the transfer of Jean-Kevin Augustin.
SUDAN: After almost six months of stoppage due to coronavirus, the 2019-20 Sudan Premier League resumes with matchday 26 fixtures.

Thursday September 17

USA: MLS expansion team St. Louis City SC set a new league record by receiving 50,000 season-ticket deposits on their first day.

Comeback...The Copa Libertadores returned in September

Staying...Aston Villa's Jack Grealish

FIFA: The latest FIFA rankings are revealed, with Belgium remaining top. Russia are the biggest movers, moving six up places.
FRANCE: Former France defender Daniel Charles-Alfred dies.

Friday September 18

ITALY: American tycoon Kyle Krause acquires a 90 per cent stake ownership of Parma.
GERMANY: Defender Neven Subotic leaves Union Berlin after spending 11 of his last 12 seasons in the Bundesliga.

Saturday September 19

ITALY: Italian regions begin to open stadiums to small crowds.
EGYPT: Al Ahly extend their run of Egyptian league titles to five by winning the 2019-20 campaign – their 42nd in their history.

Sunday September 20

CAMEROON: Ephrem M'Bom, left-back at the 1982 World Cup, passes away.
USA: In Montreal Impact's clash with Philadelphia Union, Romell Quioto scores after five minutes, then gets sent off ten minutes later.
TUNISIA: Esperance win their fifth Tunisian Super Cup title, beating rivals CS Sfaxien 5-4 on penalties after a goalless draw.
ENGLAND: Manchester City midfielder Ilkay Gundogan tests positive for COVID-19.

Monday September 21

VIETNAM: Hanoi FC win the Vietnamese Cup final with an 88th-minute winner to defeat Viettel 2-1.
SIERRA LEONE: The government and football association jointly announce that both the men and women's teams will receive equal pay.
ITALY: Referee Daniele De Santis is found dead in his apartment, along with his partner.
PORTUGAL: Sporting rename their youth academy the 'Academia Cristiano Ronaldo'. Meanwhile, former Boavista and Portugal midfielder Jaime Alves passes away aged 55.

Tuesday September 22

ITALY: Serie C players announce that they will go on strike in protest at the introduction of 22-man squads.
CONCACAF: It's announced that the CONCACAF Nations League semi-finals and final, will be moved from March to June 2021 in the USA.
ENGLAND: West Ham manager David Moyes, plus Hammers players Issa Diop and Josh Cullen, all test positive for COVID-19.

Wednesday September 23

ASIA: Defending champions Al Hilal are kicked out of the AFC Champions League after coronavirus forces them to name a starting line-up of just nine players with two goalkeepers on the substitutes' bench.
GERMANY: Mainz players boycott training in protest over the treatment of team-mate Adam Szalai, who was told to train away from the first team after being transfer listed.
PORTUGAL: The world's richest footballer, Faiq Bolkiah – son of the Prince of Brunei with an estimated net worth of $20 billion – joins Maritimo.
ENGLAND: Kai Havertz scores his first Chelsea goals with a hat-trick in a 6-0 EFL Cup third round victory against Championship side Barnsley.

Thursday September 24

HUNGARY: Bayern beat Sevilla 2-1 after extra-time in the UEFA Super Cup. Leon Gortezka cancels out Lucas Ocampos' third- ➤

Dominican Republic

STEVE MENARY

A long journey

Coronavirus stalls the progress of the Caribbean nation

When Jacques Passy moved to the Dominican Republic in January to take charge of the country's team in the Olympic qualifiers, he was, like all new coaches, full of the possibilities that lay ahead.

The Mexican soon took on the same post for a national team in a good position. In 2015, a professional league was launched on the island. With the players from that competition and a huge diaspora in Spain courtesy of enduring links from a period of colonisation that ended two centuries ago, Passy has a massive pool of more than 350 players.

Then coronavirus struck.

The league was due to begin in March but never kicked off. The Olympic qualifiers were never staged and nobody even knows when they will be. The national team has not played since a 2-0 defeat to El Salvador in November 2019 and the start of World Cup qualifying has been pushed back to March 2021.

If a team starting in the first round – like the Dominican Republic – qualifies for the Octagonal and finishes fourth to earn an Inter-confederation play-off, that involves 22 matches. Between March 2021 and the start of the World Cup in Qatar, there are just six international windows.

In action...Dominican Republic's Enmy Pena on the ball during his country's last game

> "We are making a different plan every week. I have no idea what will happen"
>
> Jacques Passy, Dominican Republic coach

"We are making a different plan every week," sighs Passy. "I have no idea what will happen."

Even playing friendlies is problematic as there are quarantines in around 30 CONCACAF members. Passy decided against an October friendly with Guatemala as he could not call on European-based players as they may face quarantine on returning home.

"We have less time to train with each other, but I believe all the other teams are in the same position as us and have the same possibilities of qualifying," says defender Enmy Pena, who plays in Malta for Valletta.

Playing three internationals in one international window has been mooted but travel in CONCACAF is complicated. First round groups could end up being played in one venue all at once.

Passy is particularly frustrated by the impact on the local league, which was a big gamble for the local federation but has been a big success. Crowds were growing and teams faring well in regional competitions. Cibao and Atletico Pantoja won the Caribbean Club Championship in 2017 and 2018 respectively, and both were well placed to repeat that feat this year after reaching the semi-finals before the virus stuck.

"The pro league was the best league in the Caribbean from my point of view," says Passy. "The last three or four years, players have been going abroad like Dorny Romero, who just went to Venados in Mexico. To have the league suspended for a whole year after just five seasons is having a huge impact. Many players do not have contracts.

"Of course, no one is to blame. The situation is the situation."

All Passy can do is focus on Group D, whenever that materialises. His team should be capable of beating Barbados, Dominica and Anguilla, but top seeds Panama are a different proposition.

"Some people here think Panama are non-achievable because they were World Cup finalists in 2018 but I think it's a game we can win," says Passy. "I think we can win the group with the team we are putting together."

If Passy's team do top Group D, they may be setting off on a very long journey.

Competing... Cibao played in the 2018 CONCACAF Champions League

➤ minute penalty, before Javi Martinez scores the winner.
BRAZIL: Flamengo coach Domenec Torrent tests positive for coronavirus, bringing the total number of cases at the club to 17, including several players and the vice-president.
ITALY: Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic tests positive for COVID-19.
NORTH MACEDONIA: Tottenham Hotspur beat Shkendija 3-1 in their Europa League qualifier, but the game is overshadowed by Spurs boss Jose Mourinho successfully complaining to UEFA about the size of the goalposts before the game.

Friday September 25

USA: FC Cincinnati announce that they've formed a strategic partnership with German side Hoffenheim.

Saturday September 26

PARAGUAY: Cerro Porteno are crowned champions of the Paraguayan Apertura tournament after defeating River Plate 3-1.
GERMANY: Augsburg stun Dortmund by beating them 2-0 to go top of the league. Approximately 6,000 fans were allowed inside the stadium to watch the game.
ITALY: Internazionale score twice in the last three minutes to seal a thrilling 4-3 victory over Fiorentina, while Atalanta beat Torino 4-2 away in an exciting evening in Serie A.

Sunday September 27

ENGLAND: An extraordinary Premier League weekend, with Leicester winning 5-2 at Manchester City, Manchester United beating Brighton 3-2 with a penalty awarded by VAR after the final whistle had blown, and Chelsea recovering from a 3-0 deficit to draw with West Brom.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich's 32-match unbeaten run is brought to an end by Hoffenheim in a shock 4-1 defeat.

Monday September 28

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: Reigning champions Lae City FC finish top of the 2019-20 National Soccer League.

Tuesday September 29

TURKMENISTAN: Turkmenistan welcomes the return of ➤

South America

TIM VICKERY

Copa Libertadores round-up

Group stage of delayed competition finally reaches its conclusion

The Copa Libertadores was forced to shut down for six months and, as the Argentine championship has yet to resume, it meant that when South America's premier club competition resumed in mid-September, River Plate had not played a competitive match in all that time. Even training opportunities had been limited. So it was extraordinary that for the first game back, away to Sao Paulo of Brazil, River coach Marcelo Gallardo went with three strikers and two attacking midfielders.

His ring-rusty team, inevitably far from match fit, opted to carry the game away to a powerful opponent in full competitive rhythm – and it worked. River went behind to an early own goal, roared back to take the lead, and were only denied victory by another own goal. Two weeks later, when they met again in Buenos Aires, promising striker Julian Alvarez was in excellent form and River won a fine 2-1 victory, passing holes in the Sao Paulo defence until the legs grew weary in the second half.

The defeat meant that Sao Paulo were the first, and probably the only, Brazilian side not to make it into the knockout stages. To be fair, their group was the only one with three former champions. But with one round to go, they had no hope of catching River or Ecuador's Liga de Quito.

Two rounds of group matches were played in early March, and three more in the second half of September, when amid empty stadiums and detailed health protocols, much was resolved. Of the 16

In form...Boca Juniors finished top of Group H

second round slots, 11 had already been snapped up, with two more all but mathematically allocated.

With a game still to go Peru had lost all hope of having a team in the last 16 – the country's seventh consecutive washout. And Colombia is close to its third washout in four years – a very disappointing return for a country that has punched well below its weight since Atletico Nacional won the title in 2016. Chile were also at risk, along with Bolivia and Venezuela – although considering the leagues in the latter two nations had yet to restart, this would scarcely be a surprise.

River Plate were outstanding, but considering their long lay off, it was striking how well almost all of the Argentines performed on the restart. Argentina was the only country to vote against the resumption of the Libertadores, and there was much moaning from the coaches of their clubs about the lack of preparation relative to their opponents. But in the event, their five teams did better in September than they had done in March, when they were at no physical disadvantage.

That said, the Brazilian contingent look especially strong, in spite of Sao Paulo's elimination.

Suffering...Santos forward Raniel

Incidents involving Brazilian clubs have also highlighted the determination to plough ahead with the competition – and the dangers of doing so.

Reigning champions Flamengo spent over a week in Ecuador, where they played two matches. Away from their training centre, they found it harder to isolate and protect their delegation, and suffered a mass outbreak of coronavirus. In the end 20 players tested positive, plus coaches and directors.

Several of these results had already come through before the second game, against Barcelona of Guayaquil, a city traumatised by its outbreak, where in early April it was estimated that a third of its inhabitants had the virus. The local health authorities suspended the match – and all available political levers were pulled to make sure that it went ahead. An afternoon of backstage machinations ended with the Ecuadorian national authorities over-ruling the local, leaving the feeling that the main aim of the emergency regulations is to protect the continuation of the competition.

Flamengo's first opponents on their Ecuador trip, Independiente del Valle, then reported a coronavirus outbreak of their own And soon after the end of the fifth week of group phase action came worrying news of Raniel, a 24-year-old striker with Santos. He tested positive for coronavirus at the start of September and served his quarantine period before returning to the squad, starting at home to Olimpia of Paraguay and then coming off the bench away to Delfin of Ecuador and in the return game against Olimpia.

Two days later he was in hospital with deep vein thrombosis in his right leg – a condition probably related to the after effects of COVID-19 plus the number of flights he had been taking to fulfil the fixture marathon in the Brazilian Championship and the Copa Libertadores.

Considering their long lay off, it was striking how well almost all of the Argentines performed on the restart

Deadly duo... River Plate strike partners Rafael Santos Borre and Julian Alvarez

➤ domestic football, with Altyn Asyr beating Ahal on penalties to win the Turkmenistan Super Cup after a 1-1 draw in Ashgabat.
EUROPE: In the Champions League qualifying play-offs, Olympiakos, Dynamo Kiev and Ferencvaros secure their places in the group stage.

Wednesday September 30

EUROPE: Midtjylland, Red Bull Salzburg and Krasnodar also book their places in the Champions League group stage.
QATAR: VAR is used in an AFC club competition for the first time, in the Champions League quarter-final between Al Nassr and Al Ahli Saudi FC.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich win their fifth trophy under Hansi Flick, beating Borussia Dortmund 3-2 in the German Super Cup.

Thursday October 1

KYRGYZSTAN: FC Dordoi are crowned champions of the Kyrgyz Republic for the 12th time after their 5-1 victory over fellow Bishkek outfit Alga gives them an unassailable six-point lead with one round remaining.
ENGLAND: Tottenham secure their place in the Europa League group stage after hammering Maccabi Haifa 7-2 thanks to a Harry Kane hat-trick. Meanwhile Arsenal beat Liverpool 5-4 on penalties in the EFL Cup.
PORTUGAL: Milan also seal their place in the Europa League group stage, requiring an astonishing 24-penalty shoot-out victory to see off Rio Ave.
UEFA: Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski is named UEFA Men's Player of the Year, while new Chelsea signing Pernille Harder collect the Women's gong.

Friday October 2

FRANCE: Neymar registers his first goals of the season in a 6-1 victory for Paris Saint-Germain over Angers.

Saturday October 3

MALAYSIA: Johor Darul Ta'zim wrap up their seventh consecutive Malaysia Super League title by beating Sabah 4-1 to move eight points clear with just one game to go.
ENGLAND: Everton's perfect start to the season continues with a 4-2 victory over Brighton, with ➤

Africa

MARK GLEESON

AFCON qualifiers re-commence

The race to Cameroon 2022 finally returns after an entire year's hiatus

Hero's welcome... Madagascar's team coach is swamped after their AFCON debut in 2019

The slow opening up of borders across Africa, amid much caution over the coronavirus pandemic, means the resumption of Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers will be the first competitive football in a year for the continent's national teams.

The preliminaries ahead of the next Cup of Nations finals are still only at the halfway stage and the tournament itself put back a year as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

There are 23 places up for grabs at the finals, along with hosts Cameroon, who are competing in the preliminaries but guaranteed a berth at the finals.

The qualifying competition is set up such that it is virtually guaranteed that all the continent's powerhouses should qualify, as the top two teams in each of the groups (except that of Cameroon) go on to the finals.

Fourteen countries have previously won the African championship and the overwhelming majority of them should return for another tilt at the title. Only Ethiopia, long past their heyday of the early '60s, and surprisingly Zambia look in peril of missing out.

Ethiopia did have an impressive home win over the Ivory Coast last time out but will need to get more points, particularly home and away over Niger at the resumption of the qualifiers, to stay in realistic contention of qualifying.

Realistically, the Ivorians, despite all the tumult at association level, should scramble back to win the group and Ethiopia need to catch up to Madagascar, who head the Group K standings after registering victory in their opening pair of matches.

Madagascar debuted at the last finals in Egypt and proved the fairy-tale story of the tournament – their motley crew of players, drawn from clubs literally across the world, were eventually eliminated in the quarter-finals.

Nigeria hot-shot... Victor Osimhen is qualifying's current joint-top scorer

Burundi and Mauritania were the other newcomers at the 2019 finals – expanded to 24 teams for the first time – and there is avid interest in seeing if there might be more new faces at Cameroon 2022.

Of the 54 full members of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), there are now only 12 who have never been to the finals.

But The Gambia, coached by well-travelled Belgian Tom Saintfiet, have taken an early lead in a tough Group D after holding the Democratic Republic of Congo to a draw and then pulling off a shock away win in Angola.

They can consolidate their chances home and away against Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's Gabon in their latest round of qualifying.

The tiny Comoros islands top Group G, also punching above their weight by winning away in Togo and then holding Egypt to a goalless draw at home. They have the capability to take points off Kenya next, having put together a competitive team from a significant emigrant community in France, mostly based around Marseille.

Coach Amir Abdou, who lives in France, has been able to find players at clubs across Europe and build a side whose ability belies the small status of the island nation. Defender Fouad Bachirou, for example, is French born and a Paris Saint-Germain youth product who recently moved from Malmo in Sweden to Nottingham Forest.

The Central African Republic and the small mountain kingdom of Lesotho also hold out hope of a first-ever finals place. Lesotho are in the same group as Nigeria, who look certain to finish top, but could yet challenge Benin and Sierra Leone for the second qualifying berth.

The 2013 winners Zambia need to stage a major comeback if they are to qualify. They started their campaign with a heavy 5-0 defeat at champions Algeria in Group H in November last year and were then defeated at home by neighbours Zimbabwe.

Zambia have since appointed the Serbian Milutin Sredojevic as coach with the task of resurrecting their chances. He was the coach when Uganda returned to the finals for the first time in almost 40 years in 2017.

Fourteen countries have previously won the African championship and the overwhelming majority of them should return for another tilt at the title

Qualification is scheduled to be concluded in March after which there will be some ten months to prepare for the finals, now being held in early 2022. It is an inadvertent return to the days when the Cup of Nations was hosted in the same year as a World Cup.

CAF switched in 2013 to hosting the finals every odd year because they felt it was too big a clash on both a competitive and commercial level.

But the reality was that it also offered African qualifiers for the World Cup the unique advantage of having a competitive tournament to use as a warm-up. Too often, however, this was spurned particularly when coaches were fired after poor Nations Cup performances on the eve of World Cup tournaments, throwing teams into total turmoil. That is a real possibility that awaits again, between Cameroon 2022 and Qatar 2022.

Tough task... can Sredojevic help turn around Zambia's fortunes?

India

JOHN DUERDEN

ISL now India's No.1

The Indian Super League is ready to begin after being recognised as the country's top division

All being well, the 2020-21 Indian Super League (ISL) season will start on November 21 for its biggest and longest campaign yet, because what started out as a brief but glamorous sideshow in 2014 has now become the main event in this country of 1.4 billion.

Six years ago, the I-League was the top tier but it struggled to compete with the glamour of eight new franchises in the ISL, owned by a mixture of Bollywood stars, cricket players, big business and European clubs, that burst onto the scene.

Suddenly the likes of Alessandro Del Piero, Robert Pires and Freddie Ljungberg were playing in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata and being coached by Zico, Marco Materazzi and Peter Reid. Average attendances were 24,000 and with a media profile that the I-League could only dream of, it was inevitable that there would be a debate as to how the ISL could become a bigger part of the football scene.

That debate ended last year when the Super League, which started out as an eight-team ten-week affair but will now have 11 teams and last for almost six months, was recognised as the country's top tier. The I-League is now number two though there is not yet promotion and relegation – that should happen in a couple of years.

"The League has changed a lot since its inception," says Anirudh Thapa of Chennaiyin, one of the league's brightest talents. "It has become a longer league with more teams."

Just as the national team has improved, qualifying for the 2019 Asian Cup, so has the ISL with more investment meaning better facilities and coaching, even if there is still a long way to go. "Lots of young players are coming up," added Thapa. "The intensity and temperament of the league has taken a jump over the last few seasons. The reduction in foreign players in the squad has also allowed younger players to get more game time on the pitch."

Top talent... Chennaiyin's Anirudh Thapa in action for India

> "Lots of young players are coming up...The intensity and temperament of the league has taken a jump over the last few seasons"
>
> Anirudh Thapa, Chennaiyin midfielder

With the ISL becoming number one, the big debate moved on to what to do with the two biggest teams in Indian football which had been playing in the I-League. When the Kolkata giants of East Bengal and Mohun Bagan meet at the city's Salt Lake Stadium, there are

➤ goals from Dominic Calvert-Lewin, Yerry Mina and two for James Rodriguez putting the Toffees top after four games.

USA: DC United make an illegal substitution in a heavy MLS defeat to Atlanta United – bringing on Russell Canouse, who was not named on the official teamsheet – leading to a ten-minute sideline discussion involving the referees, officials and both benches.

Sunday October 4

ENGLAND: In another crazy day in the Premier League, Tottenham beat Manchester United 6-1 at Old Trafford, before champions Liverpool lose 7-2 away to Aston Villa.

GERMANY: Robert Lewandowski scores four goals, including a 93rd-minute penalty, in Bayern's 4-3 win over Hertha Berlin.

FRANCE: Dimitri Payet scores then gets sent off three minutes later in Marseille's 1-1 draw with Lyon. Meanwhile, Rennes' winning streak is brought to an end by a draw with Reims, yet they remain top of the table on goal difference.

ITALY: Atalanta's strong start continues with another high-scoring win, beating Cagliari 5-2. Elsewhere, two red cards are shown in Lazio's 1-1 draw with Internazionale, while Juventus are awarded a 3-0 over Napoli with the latter also being docked one point for failing to fulfil the fixture.

SPAIN: Sergino Dest makes history by becoming the first American to play for Barcelona after coming off the bench in a 1-1 league draw with Sevilla.

Monday October 5

CHINA: Former China women's national team head coach Hao Wei is named as successor to Li Xiaopeng at Shandong Lueng.

NIGERIA: American Randy Waldrum is named head coach of the national women's team of Nigeria.

ENGLAND: Tammy Abraham, Ben Chilwell and Jadon Sancho are told to delay their arrival to the England squad after breaching lockdown rules to attend a party.

Kolkata derby... East Bengal v ATK Mohun Bagan will finally take place in the ISL

crowds close to 100,000. It was unthinkable that the pair would not be in the top tier.

That has been solved. In January, Mohun Bagan merged with ISL club ATK to become known as ATK Mohun Bagan. East Bengal, were confirmed as team number 11 in September.

It means the ISL will have the traditional Kolkata derby for the first time after all, though it won't be very traditional. Instead of the usual massive crowd there will be an empty arena in Goa. The entire season will be played in this west-coast region known internationally more for beautiful beaches than the beautiful game, though it is actually one of the subcontinent's football hotbeds.

FC Goa actually finished top of the standings last season (and booked a place in the group stage of the 2021 Asian Champions League, another sign that the ISL is the main show in town) but lost out in the first game of the final series to Chennaiyin. The southerners went on to lose the final to ATK, who had defeated Bengaluru in the other semi-final.

Those four should be in the mix once more. Goa, a former Portuguese enclave, have a strong Spanish streak with coach Juan Ferrando preparing for his first season with a number of compatriots to choose from – though Ferran Corominas, the ex-Espanyol striker who has scored almost a goal a game in the past three seasons, looks to be leaving.

Bengaluru, apart from the two Kolkata clubs, the only other team to make the move from the I-League, are led by Indian icon Sunil Chhetri and international goalkeeper and just-named Player of the Year Gupreet Singh at the other end.

ATK Mohun Bagan have last year's joint-top scorer, Fiji forward Roy Krishna while Chennaiyin have lost their Lithuanian goal getter, Nerijus Valskis. He has joined Jamshedpur, now coached by Owen Coyle, and the team, established by steel giant Tata in 2017, has assembled a well-balanced squad that has ambitions of a top-four finish and a place in the play-offs.

All eyes will officially be on the ISL for the first time but with the coronavirus still around, just finishing the season without too many complications will be enough, for now.

ISL launch...Pires and Zico boosted the league's profile after joining Goa in 2014

Wednesday October 7

FRANCE: Eduardo Camavinga becomes France's youngest goalscorer in over 100 years

Les Bleus young gun... Camavinga

in the 7-1 victory over Ukraine – the worst defeat in their history. 45-year-old keeper Oleksandr Shovkovskiy comes out of retirement to appear on the bench after three other keepers tested positive for COVID-19.

ANDORRA: England U21s are held to a shock 3-3 draw by minnows Andorra after Christian Garcia scores a 91st-minute equaliser for the hosts.

Thursday October 8

FIFA: FIFA rejects Sevilla forward Munir El Haddadi's request to switch from Spain to Morocco.

EUROPE: Northern Ireland, Scotland and Slovakia book their places in the European Championship play-off finals thanks to penalty shoot-out wins, while Serbia also qualify by beating Norway 2-1.

SOUTH AMERICA: South American qualifying for the 2022 World Cup begins. Uruguay and Argentina both pick up wins, while Paraguay and Peru play out an action-packed draw.

INDIA: Bhawanipore kick off the 2020-21 I-League qualifiers with a 2-0 win over Bengaluru United, while Mohammedan Sporting Club strike in stoppage-time against Garhwal as competitive football finally returns in India.

Friday October 9

ENGLAND: Premier League announces plans to show all fixtures on television, but with an extra pay-per-view charge of £14.95 for selected matches.

PREMIER LEAGUE 2020-21

ARSENAL

GOALKEEPERS
1 Bernd **LENO** (Ger) (28) 04.03.92
13 Alex **RUNARSSON** (Isl) (25) 18.02.95
33 Matt **MACEY** (26) 09.09.94

DEFENDERS
2 Hector **BELLERIN** (Spa) (25) 19.03.95
3 Kieran **TIERNEY** (Sco) (23) 05.06.97
4 William **SALIBA** (Fra) (19) 24.03.01
5 **SOKRATIS** (Gre) (32) 09.06.88
6 **GABRIEL** Magalhaes (Bra) (22) 19.12.97
16 Rob **HOLDING** (25) 20.09.95
17 **CEDRIC** Soares (Por) (29) 31.08.91
20 Shkodran **MUSTAFI** (Ger) (28) 17.04.92
21 Calum **CHAMBERS** (25) 20.01.95
22 Pablo **MARI** (Spa) (27) 31.08.93
23 David **LUIZ** (Bra) (33) 22.04.87
31 Sead **KOLASINAC** (Bih) (27) 20.06.93

MIDFIELDERS
7 Bukayo **SAKA** (19) 05.09.01
8 Dani **CEBALLOS** (Spa) (24) 07.08.96
10 Mesut **OZIL** (Ger) (31) 15.10.88
15 Ainsley **MAITLAND-NILES** (23) 29.08.97
18 Thomas **PARTEY** (Gha) (27) 13.06.93
25 Mohamed **ELNENY** (Egy) (28) 11.07.92
28 Joe **WILLOCK** (21) 20.08.99
32 Emile **SMITH ROWE** (20) 28.07.00
34 Granit **XHAKA** (Sui) (28) 27.09.92

FORWARDS
9 Alexandre **LACAZETTE** (Fra) (29) 28.05.91
12 **WILLIAN** (Bra) (32) 09.08.88
14 Pierre-E. **AUBAMEYANG** (Gab) (31) 18.06.89
19 Nicolas **PEPE** (Civ) (25) 29.05.95
24 Reiss **NELSON** (20) 10.12.99
30 Eddie **NKETIAH** (21) 30.05.99
35 Gabriel **MARTINELLI** (Bra) (19) 18.06.01

COACH
Mikel **ARTETA** (Spa) (38) 26.03.82

ASTON VILLA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Tom **HEATON** (34) 15.04.86
12 Jed **STEER** (28) 23.09.92
26 Emiliano **MARTINEZ** (Arg) (28) 02.09.92
28 Lovre **KALINIC** (Cro) (30) 03.04.90

DEFENDERS
2 Matty **CASH** (23) 07.08.97
3 Neil **TAYLOR** (Wal) (31) 07.02.89
4 Ezri **KONSA** (23) 23.10.97
5 Tyrone **MINGS** (27) 13.03.93
18 Matt **TARGETT** (25) 18.09.95
22 Bjorn **ENGELS** (Bel) (26) 15.09.94
24 Frederic **GUILBERT** (Fra) (25) 24.12.94
27 Ahmed **ELMOHAMADY** (Egy) (33) 09.09.87
30 Kortney **HAUSE** (25) 16.07.95

MIDFIELDERS
6 **DOUGLAS LUIZ** (Bra) (22) 09.05.98
7 John **MCGINN** (Sco) (25) 186.94
8 Henri **LANSBURY** (29) 12.10.90
10 Jack **GREALISH** (25) 10.09.95
14 Conor **HOURIHANE** (Irl) (29) 02.02.91
17 **TREZEGUET** (Egy) (26) 01.10.94
19 Marvelous **NAKAMBA** (Zim) (26) 19.01.94
20 Ross **BARKLEY** (26) 05.12.93
21 Anwar **EL GHAZI** (Ned) (25) 03.05.95
41 Jacob **RAMSEY** (19) 28.05.01

FORWARDS
9 **WESLEY** (Bra) (23) 26.11.96
11 Ollie **WATKINS** (24) 30.12.95
15 Bertrand **TRAORE** (Bfa) (25) 06.09.95
39 Keinan **DAVIS** (22) 13.02.98

COACH
Dean **SMITH** (49) 19.03.71

BRIGHTON

GOALKEEPERS
1 Mat **RYAN** (Aus) (28) 08.04.92
23 Jason **STEELE** (30) 18.08.90
26 Robert **SANCHEZ** (Spa) (22) 18.11.97
31 Christian **WALTON** (24) 09.11.95

DEFENDERS
2 Tariq **LAMPTEY** (20) 30.09.00
3 Ben **WHITE** (23) 08.10.97
4 Adam **WEBSTER** (25) 04.01.95
5 Lewis **DUNK** (28) 21.11.91
30 **BERNARDO** (Bra) (25) 14.05.95
33 Dan **BURN** (28) 09.05.92
34 Joel **VELTMAN** (Ned) (28) 15.01.92

MIDFIELDERS
8 Yves **BISSOUMA** (Mli) (24) 30.08.96
10 Alexis **MAC ALLISTER** (Arg) (21) 24.12.98
11 Leandro **TROSSARD** (Bel) (25) 04.12.94
13 Pascal **GROSS** (Ger) (29) 15.06.91
14 Adam **LALLANA** (32) 10.05.88
17 Steven **ALZATE** (Col) (22) 08.09.98
19 Jose **IZQUIERDO** (Col) (28) 07.07.92
20 Solly **MARCH** (26) 20.07.94
24 Davy **PROPPER** (Ned) (29) 02.09.91
41 Max **SANDERS** (21) 04.01.99
49 Jayson **MOLUMBY** (Irl) (21) 06.08.99

FORWARDS
7 Aaron **CONNOLLY** (Irl) (20) 28.01.00
9 Neal **MAUPAY** (Fra) (24) 14.08.96
16 Alireza **JAHANBAKHSH** (Irn) (27) 11.08.93
21 Florin **ANDONE** (Rou) (27) 11.04.93
29 Andi **ZEQIRI** (Sui) (21) 22.06.99

COACH
Graham **POTTER** (45) 20.05.75

BURNLEY

GOALKEEPERS
1 Nick **POPE** (28) 19.04.92
15 Bailey **PEACOCK-FARRELL** (Nir) (24) 29.10.96
25 Will **NORRIS** (27) 12.08.93

DEFENDERS
2 Matthew **LOWTON** (31) 09.06.89
3 Charlie **TAYLOR** (27) 18.09.93
5 James **TARKOWSKI** (27) 19.11.92
6 Ben **MEE** (31) 21.09.89
23 Erik **PIETERS** (Ned) (32) 07.08.88
26 Phil **BARDLSEY** (Sco) (35) 28.06.85
28 Kevin **LONG** (Irl) (30) 18.08.90
34 Jimmy **DUNNE** (Irl) (23) 19.10.97

MIDFIELDERS
4 Jack **CORK** (31) 25.06.89
7 Johann **GUDMUNDSSON** (Isl) (30) 27.10.90
8 Josh **BROWNHILL** (24) 19.12.95
11 Dwight **MCNEIL** (20) 22.11.99
12 Robbie **BRADY** (Irl) (28) 14.01.92
16 Dale **STEPHENS** (31) 12.06.89
18 Ashley **WESTWOOD** (30) 01.04.90

FORWARDS
9 Chris **WOOD** (Nzl) (28) 07.12.91
10 Ashley **BARNES** (31) 30.10.89
19 Jay **RODRIGUEZ** (31) 29.07.89
27 Matej **VYDRA** (Cze) (28) 01.05.92

COACH
Sean **DYCHE** (49) 28.06.71

CHELSEA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Kepa **ARRIZABALAGA** (Spa) (26) 03.10.94
13 Willy **CABALLERO** (Arg) (39) 28.09.81
16 Edouard **MENDY** (Sen) (28) 01.03.92

DEFENDERS
2 Antonio **RUDIGER** (Ger) (27) 03.03.93
3 Marcos **ALONSO** (Spa) (29) 28.12.90
4 Andreas **CHRISTENSEN** (Den) (24) 10.04.96
6 THIAGO **SILVA** (Bra) (36) 22.09.84
14 Fikayo **TOMORI** (22) 19.12.97
15 Kurt **ZOUMA** (Fra) (26) 27.10.94
21 Ben **CHILWELL** (23) 21.12.96
24 Reece **JAMES** (20) 08.12.99
28 César **AZPILICUETA** (Spa) (31) 28.08.89
33 **EMERSON** Palmieri (Ita) (26) 03.08.94
Jake **CLARKE-SALTER** (23) 22.09.97
Baba **RAHMAN** (Gha) (26) 02.07.94

MIDFIELDERS
5 **JORGINHO** (Ita) (28) 20.12.91
7 N'Golo **KANTE** (Fra) (29) 29.03.91
17 Mateo **KOVACIC** (Cro) (26) 06.05.94
19 Mason **MOUNT** (21) 10.01.99
22 Hakim **ZIYECH** (Mar) (27) 19.03.93
23 Billy **GILMOUR** (Sco) (19) 11.06.01
29 Kai **HAVERTZ** (Ger) (21) 11.06.99
Danny **DRINKWATER** (30) 05.03.90
Charly **MUSONDA** (Bel) (24) 15.10.96

FORWARDS
9 Tammy **ABRAHAM** (23) 02.10.97
10 Christian **PULISIC** (USA) (22) 18.09.98
11 Timo **WERNER** (Ger) (24) 06.03.96
18 Olivier **GIROUD** (Fra) (34) 30.09.86
20 Callum **HUDSON-ODOI** (19) 07.11.00

COACH
Frank **LAMPARD** (42) 20.06.78

CRYSTAL PALACE

GOALKEEPERS
13 Wayne **HENNESSEY** (Wal) (33) 24.01.87
19 Stephen **HENDERSON** (Irl) (32) 02.05.88
31 Vicente **GUAITA** (Spa) (33) 10.01.87

DEFENDERS
2 Joel **WARD** (31) 29.10.89
3 Patrick **VAN AANHOLT** (Ned) (30) 29.08.90
5 James **TOMKINS** (31) 29.03.89
6 Scott **DANN** (33) 14.02.87
12 Mamadou **SAKHO** (Fra) (30) 13.02.90
17 Nathaniel CLYNE (29) 05.04.91
24 Gary **CAHILL** (34) 19.12.85
27 Tyrick **MITCHELL** (21) 01.09.99
34 Martin **KELLY** (30) 27.04.90
35 Sam **WOODS** (22) 11.09.98
36 Nathan **FERGUSON** (20) 06.10.00
44 Jairo **RIEDEWALD** (Ned) (24) 09.09.96

MIDFIELDERS
4 Luka **MILIVOJEVIC** (Srb) (29) 07.04.91
7 Max **MEYER** (Ger) (25) 18.09.95
8 Cheikhou **KOUYATE** (Sen) (30) 21.12.89
10 Andros **TOWNSEND** (29) 16.07.91
15 Jeffrey **SCHLUPP** (Gha) (27) 23.12.92
18 James **MCARTHUR** (Sco) (33) 07.10.87
22 James **MCCARTHY** (Irl) (29) 12.11.90
25 Eberechi **EZE** (22) 29.06.98

FORWARDS
9 Jordan **AYEW** (Gha) (29) 11.09.91
11 Wilfried **ZAHA** (Civ) (27) 10.11.92
20 Christian **BENTEKE** (Bel) (29) 03.12.90
21 Connor **WICKHAM** (27) 31.03.93
23 Michy **BATSHUAYI (Bel)** (27) 02.10.93
40 Brandon **PIERRICK** (18) 10.12.01

COACH
Roy **HODGSON** (73) 09.08.47

EVERTON

GOALKEEPERS
1 Jordan **PICKFORD** (26) 07.03.94
31 Joao **VIRGINIA** (Por) (21) 10.10.99
33 Robin **OLSEN** (Swe) (30) 08.01.90
49 Jonas **LOSSL** (Den) (31) 01.02.89

DEFENDERS
2 Jonjoe **KENNY** (23) 15.03.97
4 Mason **HOLGATE** (24) 22.10.96
5 Michael **KEANE** (27) 11.01.93
12 Lucas **DIGNE** (Fra) (27) 20.07.93
13 Yerry **MINA** (Col) (26) 23.09.94
18 Niels **NKOUNKOU** (Fra) (19) 01.11.00
22 Ben **GODFREY** (22) 15.01.98
23 Seamus **COLEMAN** (Irl) (32) 11.10.88
32 Jarrad **BRANTHWAITE** (18) 27.06.02

MIDFIELDERS
6 **ALLAN** (Bra) (29) 08.01.91
8 Fabian **DELPH** (30) 21.11.89
10 Gylfi **SIGURDSSON** (Isl) (31) 08.09.89
16 Abdoulaye **DOUCOURE** (Fra) (27) 01.01.93
17 Alex **IWOBI** (Nga) (24) 03.05.96
19 **JAMES** Rodriguez (Col) (29) 12.07.91
21 Andre **GOMES** (Por) (27) 30.07.93
25 Jean-Philippe **GBAMIN** (Civ) (25) 25.09.95
26 Tom **DAVIES** (22) 30.06.98
30 Muhamed **BESIC** (Bih) (28) 10.09.92
34 Beni **BANINGIME** (Cod) (22) 09.09.98

FORWARDS
7 **RICHARLISON** (Bra) (23) 10.05.97
9 Dominic **CALVERT-LEWIN** (23) 16.03.97
14 Cenk **TOSUN** (Tur) (29) 07.06.91
20 **BERNARD** (Bra) (28) 08.09.92
24 Anthony **GORDON** (19) 24.02.01
29 Yannick **BOLASIE** (Cod) (31) 24.05.89

COACH
Carlo **ANCELOTTI** (Ita) (61) 10.06.59

FULHAM

GOALKEEPERS
1 Alphonse **AREOLA** (Fra) (27) 27.02.93
12 Marek **RODAK** (Svk) (23) 13.12.96
31 **FABRI** (Spa) (32) 31.12.87

DEFENDERS
2 Kenny **TETE** (Ned) (25) 09.10.95
3 Michael **HECTOR** (Jam) (28) 19.07.92
4 Denis **ODOI** (Bel) (32) 27.05.88
5 Joachim **ANDERSEN** (Den) (24) 31.05.96
13 Tim **REAM** (USA) (33) 05.10.87
16 Tosin **ADARABIOYO** (23) 24.09.97
20 Maxime **LE MARCHAND** (Fra) (31) 11.10.89
23 Joe **BRYAN** (27) 17.09.93
33 Antonee **ROBINSON** (USA) (23) 08.08.97
34 Ola **AINA** (Nga) (24) 08.10.96

MIDFIELDERS
6 Kevin **MCDONALD** (Sco) (31) 04.11.88
7 Neeskens **KEBANO** (Cod) (28) 10.03.92
8 Stefan **JOHANSEN** (Nor) (29) 08.01.91
10 Tom **CAIRNEY** (Sco) (29) 20.01.91
15 Ruben **LOFTUS-CHEEK** (24) 23.01.96
18 Mario **LEMINA** (Gab) (27) 01.09.93
21 Harrison **REED** (25) 27.01.95
24 Jean Michael **SERI** (Civ) (29) 19.07.91
25 Josh **ONOMAH** (23) 27.04.97
29 Andre-Frank **ZAMBO ANGUISSA** (Cmr) (24) 16.11.95

FORWARDS
9 Aleksandar **MITROVIC** (Srb) (26) 16.09.94
14 Bobby **DECORDOVA-REID** (Jam) (27) 02.02.93
17 Ivan **CAVALEIRO** (Por) (27) 18.10.93
19 Ademola **LOOKMAN** (23) 20.10.97
47 Aboubakar **KAMARA** (Fra) (25) 07.03.95

COACH
Scott **PARKER** (40) 13.10.80

LEEDS UNITED

GOALKEEPERS
1 Illan **MESLIER** (Fra) (20) 02.03.00
13 Kiko **CASILLA** (Spa) (34) 02.10.86

DEFENDERS
2 Luke **AYLING** (29) 25.08.91
5 Robin **KOCH** (Ger) (24) 17.07.96
6 Liam **COOPER** (Sco) (29) 30.08.91
10 Ezgjan **ALIOSKI** (Mkd) (28) 12.02.92
14 Diego **LLORENTE** (Spa) (27) 16.08.93
15 Stuart **DALLAS** (Nir) (29) 19.04.91
21 Pascal **STRUIJK** (Ned) (21) 11.08.99
40 Leif **DAVIS** (20) 31.12.99

MIDFIELDERS
4 Adam **FORSHAW** (29) 08.10.91
7 Ian **POVEDA** (20) 09.02.00
17 Helder **COSTA** (Por) (26) 12.01.94
19 Pablo **HERNANDEZ** (Spa) (35) 11.04.85
22 Jack **HARRISON** (23) 20.11.96
23 Kalvin **PHILLIPS** (24) 02.12.95
43 Mateusz **KLICH** (Pol) (30) 13.06.90
46 Jamie **SHACKLETON** (21) 08.10.99

FORWARDS
9 Patrick **BAMFORD** (27) 05.09.93
11 Tyler **ROBERTS** (Wal) (21) 12.01.99
18 **RAPHINHA** (Bra) (23) 14.12.96
20 **RODRIGO** (Spa) (29) 06.03.91

COACH
Marcelo **BIELSA** (Arg) (65) 21.07.55

LEICESTER CITY

GOALKEEPERS
1 Kasper **SCHMEICHEL** (Den) (33) 05.11.86
12 Danny **WARD** (Wal) (27) 22.06.93
35 Eldin **JAKUPOVIC** (Sui) (36) 02.10.84

DEFENDERS
2 James **JUSTIN** (22) 23.02.98
3 Wesley **FOFANA** (Fra) (19) 17.12.00
4 Caglar **SOYUNCU** (Tur) (24) 23.05.96
5 Wes **MORGAN** (Jam) (36) 21.01.84
6 Jonny **EVANS** (Nir) (32) 03.01.88
18 Daniel **AMARTEY** (Gha) (25) 21.12.94
21 Ricardo **PEREIRA** (Por) (27) 06.10.93
27 Timothy **CASTAGNE** (Bel) (24) 05.12.95
28 Christian **FUCHS** (Aut) (34) 07.04.86
33 Luke **THOMAS** (19) 10.06.01

MIDFIELDERS
7 Demarai **GRAY** (24) 28.06.96
8 Youri **TIELEMANS** (Bel) (23) 07.05.97
10 James **MADDISON** (23) 23.11.96
11 Marc **ALBRIGHTON** (30) 18.11.89
15 Harvey **BARNES** (22) 09.12.97
19 Cengiz **UNDER** (Tur) (23) 14.07.97
20 Hamza **CHOUDHURY** (23) 01.10.97
22 Matty **JAMES** (29) 22.07.91
24 Nampalys **MENDY** (Fra) (28) 23.06.92
25 Wilfred **NDIDI** (Nga) (23) 16.12.96
26 Dennis **PRAET** (Bel) (26) 14.05.94

FORWARDS
9 Jamie **VARDY** (33) 11.01.87
13 Islam **SLIMANI** (Alg) (32) 18.06.88
14 Kelechi **IHEANACHO** (Nga) (24) 03.10.96
17 Ayoze **PEREZ** (Spa) (27) 29.07.93

COACH
Brendan **RODGERS** (Nir) (47) 26.01.73

LIVERPOOL

GOALKEEPERS
1 **ALISSON** (Bra) (28) 02.10.92
13 **ADRIAN** (Spa) (33) 03.01.87
62 Caoimhin **KELLEHER** (Irl) (21) 23.11.98

DEFENDERS
4 Virgil **VAN DIJK** (Ned) (29) 08.07.91
12 Joe **GOMEZ** (23) 23.05.97
21 Kostas **TSIMIKAS** (Gre) (24) 12.05.96
26 Andy **ROBERTSON** (Sco) (26) 11.03.94
32 Joel **MATIP** (Cam) (29) 08.08.91
47 Nathaniel **PHILLIPS** (23) 21.03.97
66 Trent **ALEXANDER-ARNOLD** (22) 07.10.98
72 Sepp **VAN DEN BERG** (Ned) (18) 20.12.01
76 Neco **WILLIAMS** (Wal) (19) 13.04.01

MIDFIELDERS
3 **FABINHO** (Bra) (27) 23.10.93
5 Georginio **WIJNALDUM** (Ned) (29) 11.11.90
6 **THIAGO** (Spa) (29) 11.04.91
7 James **MILNER** (34) 04.01.86
8 Naby **KEITA** (Gui) (25) 10.02.95
14 Jordan **HENDERSON** (30) 17.06.90
15 Alex **OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN** (27) 15.08.93
17 Curtis **JONES** (19) 30.01.01
23 Xherdan **SHAQIRI** (Sui) (29) 10.10.91

FORWARDS
9 Roberto **FIRMINO** (Bra) (30) 02.10.91
10 Sadio **MANE** (Sen) (28) 10.04.92
11 Mohamed **SALAH** (Egy) (28) 15.06.92
18 Takumi **MINAMINO** (Jap) (25) 16.01.95
20 Diogo **JOTA** (Por) (23) 04.12.96
27 Divock **ORIGI** (Bel) (25) 18.04.95

COACH
Jurgen **KLOPP** (Ger) (53) 16.06.67

MANCHESTER CITY

GOALKEEPERS
13 Zack **STEFFEN** (USA) (25) 02.04.95
31 **EDERSON** (Bra) (27) 17.08.93
33 Scott **CARSON** (35) 03.09.85

DEFENDERS
2 Kyle **WALKER** (30) 28.05.90
3 Ruben **DIAS** (Por) (23) 14.05.97
5 John **STONES** (26) 28.05.94
6 Nathan **AKE** (Ned) (25) 18.02.95
14 Aymeric **LAPORTE** (Fra) (26) 27.05.94
22 Benjamin **MENDY** (Fra) (26) 17.07.94
27 Joao **CANCELO** (Spa) (26) 27.05.94
34 Phillippe **SANDLER** (Ned) (23) 10.02.97
50 Eric **GARCIA** (Spa) (19) 09.01.01

MIDFIELDERS
8 Ilkay **GUNDOGAN** (Ger) (30) 24.10.90
11 Oleksandr **ZINCHENKO** (Ukr) (23) 15.12.96
16 **RODRI** (Spa) (24) 22.06.96
17 Kevin **DE BRUYNE** (Bel) (29) 28.06.91
20 Bernardo **SILVA** (Por) (26) 10.08.94
25 **FERNANDINHO** (Bra) (35) 04.05.85
26 Riyad **MAHREZ** (Alg) (29) 21.02.91
47 Phil **FODEN** (20) 28.05.00

FORWARDS
7 Raheem **STERLING** (25) 08.12.94
9 Gabriel **JESUS** (Bra) (23) 03.04.97
10 Sergio **AGUERO** (Agu) (32) 02.06.88
21 Ferran **TORRES** (Spa) (20) 29.02.00
48 Liam **DELAP** (17) 08.02.03

COACH
Pep **GUARDIOLA** (Spa) (49) 18.01.71

MANCHESTER UTD

GOALKEEPERS
1 David **DE GEA** (Spa) (29) 07.11.90
13 Lee **GRANT** (37) 27.01.83
22 Sergio **ROMERO** (Arg) (33) 22.02.87
26 Dean **HENDERSON** (23) 12.03.97

DEFENDERS
2 Victor **LINDELOF** (Swe) (26) 17.07.94
3 Eric **BAILLY** (Civ) (26) 12.04.94
4 Phil **JONES** (28) 21.02.92
5 Harry **MAGUIRE** (27) 05.03.93
16 Marcos **ROJO** (Arg) (30) 20.03.90
23 Luke **SHAW** (25) 12.07.95
24 Tim **FOSU-MENSAH** (Ned) (22) 02.01.98
27 Alex **TELLES** (Bra) (27) 15.12.92
29 Aaron **WAN-BISSAKA** (22) 26.11.97
33 Brandon **WILLIAMS** (20) 03.09.00
38 Axel **TUANZEBE** (22) 14.11.97
43 Teden **MENGI** (18) 30.04.02

MIDFIELDERS
6 Paul **POGBA** (Fra) (27) 15.03.93
8 Juan **MATA** (Spa) (32) 28.04.88
14 Jesse **LINGARD** (27) 15.12.92
17 **FRED** (Bra) (27) 05.03.93
18 Bruno **FERNANDES** (Por) (26) 08.09.94
21 Daniel **JAMES** (Wal) (22) 10.11.97
31 Nemanja **MATIC** (Srb) (32) 01.08.88
34 Donny **VAN DE BEEK** (Ned) (23) 18.04.97
39 Scott **MCTOMINAY** (Sco) (23) 08.12.96

FORWARDS
7 Edinson **CAVANI** (Uru) (33) 14.02.87
9 Anthony **MARTIAL** (Fra) (24) 05.12.95
10 Marcus **RASHFORD** (23) 31.10.97
11 Mason **GREENWOOD** (19) 01.10.01
25 Odion **IGHALO** (Nga) (31) 16.06.89
28 Facundo **PELLISTRI** (Uru) (18) 20.12.01

COACH
Ole Gunnar **SOLSKJAER** (Nor) (47) 26.02.73

NEWCASTLE UTD

GOALKEEPERS
1 Martin **DUBRAVKA** (Svk) (31) 15.01.89
26 Karl **DARLOW** (30) 08.10.90
29 Mark **GILLESPIE** (28) 27.03.92
54 Dan **LANGLEY** (20) 14.10.00

DEFENDERS
2 Ciaran **CLARK** (Irl) (31) 26.09.89
3 Paul **DUMMETT** (Wal) (29) 26.09.91
5 Fabian **SCHAR** (Sui) (28) 20.12.91
6 Jamaal **LASCELLES** (26) 11.11.93
15 Jamal **LEWIS** (Nir) (22) 25.01.98
17 Emil **KRAFTH** (Swe) (26) 02.08.94
18 Federico **FERNANDEZ** (Arg) (31) 21.02.89
19 Javier **MANQUILLO** (Spa) (26) 05.05.94
22 DeAndre **YEDLIN** (USA) (27) 09.07.93

MIDFIELDERS
8 Jonjo **SHELVEY** (28) 27.02.92
10 Allan **SAINT-MAXIMIN** (Fra) (23) 12.03.97
11 Matt **RITCHIE** (Sco) (31) 10.09.89
14 Isaac **HAYDEN** (25) 22.03.95
16 Jeff **HENDRICK** (Irl) (28) 31.01.92
21 Ryan **FRASER** (Sco) (26) 24.02.94
23 Jacob **MURPHY** (25) 24.02.95
28 Henri **SAIVET** (Sen) (30) 26.10.90
30 Christian **ATSU** (Gha) (28) 10.01.92
36 Sean **LONGSTAFF** (23) 30.10.97
43 Matty **LONGSTAFF** (20) 21.03.00

FORWARDS
7 Andy **CARROLL** (31) 06.01.89
9 **JOELINTON** (Bra) (24) 14.08.96
12 Dwight **GAYLE** (31) 17.10.89
13 Callum **WILSON** (28) 27.02.92
24 Miguel **ALMIRON** (Par) (26) 10.02.94

COACH
Steve **BRUCE** (59) 31.12.60

SHEFFIELD UTD

GOALKEEPERS
1 Aaron **RAMSDALE** (22) 14.05.98
18 Wes **FODERINGHAM** (29) 14.01.91
21 Michael **VERRIPS** (Ned) (23) 03.12.96
25 Simon **MOORE** (30) 19.05.90

DEFENDERS
2 George **BALDOCK** (27) 09.03.93
3 Enda **STEVENS** (Irl) (30) 09.07.90
5 Jack **O'CONNELL** (26) 29.03.94
6 Chris **BASHAM** (32) 30.05.88
12 John **EGAN** (Irl) (28) 20.10.92
13 Max **LOWE** (23) 11.05.97
15 Phil **JAGIELKA** (38) 17.08.82
19 Jack **ROBINSON** (27) 01.09.93
20 Jayden **BOGLE** (20) 27.07.00
22 Ethan **AMPADU** (Wal) (20) 14.09.00
29 Kean **BRYAN** (23) 01.11.96

MIDFIELDERS
4 John **FLECK** (Sco) (29) 24.08.91
7 John **LUNDSTRAM** (26) 18.02.94
8 Sander **BERGE** (Nor) (22) 14.02.98
16 Oliver **NORWOOD** (Nir) (29) 12.04.91
23 Ben **OSBORN** (26) 05.08.94
26 Jack **RODWELL** (29) 11.03.91

FORWARDS
9 Oli **MCBURNIE** (Sco) (24) 04.06.96
10 Billy **SHARP** (34) 05.02.86
11 Lys **MOUSSET** (Fra) (24) 08.02.96
14 Oliver **BURKE** (Sco) (23) 07.04.97
17 David **MCGOLDRICK** (Irl) (32) 29.11.87
24 Rhian **BREWSTER** (20) 01.04.00

COACH
Chris **WILDER** (53) 23.09.67

SOUTHAMPTON

GOALKEEPERS
1 Alex **MCCARTHY** (30) 03.12.89
28 Angus **GUNN** (24) 22.01.96
41 Harry **LEWIS** (22) 20.12.97
44 Fraser **FORSTER** (32) 17.03.88

DEFENDERS
2 Kyle **WALKER-PETERS** (23) 13.04.97
3 Ryan **BERTRAND** (31) 05.08.89
4 Jannik **VESTERGAARD** (Den) (28) 03.08.92
5 Jack **STEPHENS** (26) 27.01.94
18 Yan **VALERY** (Fra) (21) 22.02.99
22 Mohammed **SALISU** (Gha) 17.04.99
29 Jake **VOKINS** (20) 17.03.00
35 Jan **BEDNAREK** (Pol) (24) 12.04.96

MIDFIELDERS
6 Oriol **ROMEU** (Spa) (29) 24.09.91
8 James **WARD-PROWSE** (25) 01.11.94
11 Nathan **REDMOND** (26) 06.03.94
12 Moussa **DJENEPO** (Mli) (22) 15.06.98
17 Stuart **ARMSTRONG** (Sco) (28) 30.03.92
20 Will **SMALLBONE** (Irl) (20) 21.02.00
23 Nathan **TELLA** (21) 05.07.99
Ibrahima **DIALLO** (Fra) (21) 08.03.99

FORWARDS
7 Shane **LONG** (Irl) (33) 22.01.87
9 Danny **INGS** (28) 23.07.92
10 Che **ADAMS** (24) 13.07.96
14 Michael **OBAFEMI** (Irl) (20) 06.07.00
32 Theo **WALCOTT** (31) 16.03.89

COACH
Ralph **HASENHUTTL** (Aut) (53) 09.08.67

TOTTENHAM

GOALKEEPERS
1 Hugo **LLORIS** (Fra) (33) 26.12.86
12 Joe **HART** (33) 19.04.87
22 Paulo **GAZZANIGA** (Arg) (28) 02.01.92
41 Alfie **WHITEMAN** (22) 02.10.98

DEFENDERS
2 Matt **DOHERTY** (Irl) (28) 16.01.92
3 Sergio **REGUILON** (Spa) (23) 16.12.96
4 Toby **ALDERWEIRELD** (Bel) (31) 02.03.89
6 Davinson **SANCHEZ** (Col) (24) 12.06.96
15 Eric **DIER** (26) 15.01.94
24 Serge **AURIER** (Civ) (27) 24.12.92
25 Japhet **TANGANGA** (21) 31.03.99
33 Ben **DAVIES** (Wal) (27) 24.04.93
Danny **ROSE** (30) 02.07.90

MIDFIELDERS
5 Pierre-Emile **HOJBJERG** (Den) (25) 05.08.95
8 Harry **WINKS** (24) 02.02.96
17 Moussa **SISSOKO** (Fra) (31) 16.08.89
18 Giovani **LO CELSO** (Arg) (24) 09.04.96
20 Dele **ALLI** (24) 11.04.96
28 Tanguy **NDOMBELE** (Fra) (23) 28.12.96
30 Gedson **FERNANDES** (Por) (21) 09.01.99

FORWARDS
7 Heung-Min **SON** (Kor) (28) 08.07.92
9 Gareth **BALE** (Wal) (31) 16.07.89
10 Harry **KANE** (27) 28.07.93
11 Erik **LAMELA** (Arg) (28) 04.03.92
23 Steven **BERGWIJN** (Ned) (23) 08.10.97
27 Lucas **MOURA** (Bra) (28) 13.08.92
45 Carlos **VINICIUS** (Bra) (25) 25.03.95
47 Jack **CLARKE** (19) 23.11.00

COACH
Jose **MOURINHO** (Por) (57) 26.01.63

WEST BROM

GOALKEEPERS
1 Sam **JOHNSTONE** (27) 25.03.93
23 Jonathan **BOND** (27) 19.05.93
25 David **BUTTON** (31) 27.02.89

DEFENDERS
2 Darnell **FURLONG** (25) 31.10.95
3 Kieran **GIBBS** (31) 26.09.89
5 Kyle **BARTLEY** (29) 22.05.91
6 Semi **AJAYI** (Nig) (26) 09.11.93
14 Conor **TOWNSEND** (27) 04.03.93
20 Branislav **IVANOVIC** (Srb) (36) 22.02.84
22 Lee **PELTIER** (33) 11.12.86
24 Cedric **KIPRE** (Civ) (23) 09.12.96
26 Ahmed **HEGAZI** (Egy) (29) 25.01.91
27 Dara **O'SHEA** (Irl) (21) 04.03.99

MIDFIELDERS
8 Jake **LIVERMORE** (30) 14.11.89
10 Matt **PHILLIPS** (Sco) (29) 13.03.91
11 Grady **DIANGANA** (22) 19.04.98
12 Matheus **PEREIRA** (Bra) (24) 05.05.96
13 Kamil **GROSICKI** (Pol) (32) 08.06.88
16 Rekeem **HARPER** (20) 08.03.00
17 Filip **KROVINOVIC** (Cro) (25) 29.08.95
18 Conor **GALLAGHER** (20) 06.02.00
19 Romaine **SAWYERS** (Skn) (28) 02.11.91
21 Kyle **EDWARDS** (22) 17.02.98
28 Sam **FIELD** (22) 08.05.98

FORWARDS
4 Hal **ROBSON-KANU** (Wal) (31) 21.05.89
7 Callum **ROBINSON** (Irl) (25) 02.02.95
9 Kenneth **ZOHORE** (Den) (26) 31.01.94
15 Charlie **AUSTIN** (31) 05.07.89
Karlan **GRANT** (23) 18.09.97

COACH
Slaven **BILIC** (Cro) (52) 11.09.68

WEST HAM UTD

GOALKEEPERS
1 Lukasz **FABIANSKI** (Pol) (35) 18.04.85
25 David **MARTIN** (34) 22.01.86
35 Darren **RANDOLPH** (Irl) (33) 12.05.87

DEFENDERS
3 Aaron **CRESSWELL** (30) 15.12.89
4 Fabian **BALBUENA** (Par) (29) 23.08.91
5 Vladimir **COUFAL** (Cze) (28) 22.08.92
15 Craig DAWSON (30) 06.05.90
21 Angelo **OGBONNA** (Ita) (32) 23.05.88
23 Issa **DIOP** (Fra) (23) 09.01.97
24 Ryan **FREDERICKS** (28) 10.10.92
26 Arthur **MASUAKU** (Cod) (26) 07.11.93
31 Ben **JOHNSON** (20) 24.01.00

MIDFIELDERS
10 Manuel **LANZINI** (Arg) (27) 15.02.93
11 Robert **SNODGRASS** (Sco) (33) 07.09.87
16 Mark **NOBLE** (33) 08.05.87
18 Pablo **FORNALS** (Spa) (24) 22.02.96
28 Tomas **SOUCEK** (Cze) (25) 27.02.95
41 Declan **RICE** (21) 14.01.99

FORWARDS
7 Andriy **YARMOLENKO** (Ukr) (31) 23.10.89
20 Jarrod **BOWEN** (23) 20.12.96
22 Sebastien **HALLER** (Fra) (26) 22.06.94
30 Michail **ANTONIO** (30) 28.03.90

COACH
David **MOYES** (Sco) (57) 25.04.63

WOLVES

GOALKEEPERS
11 Rui **PATRICIO** (Por) (32) 15.02.88
21 John **RUDDY** (34) 24.10.86

DEFENDERS
2 Ki-Jana **HOEVER** (Ned) (18) 18.01.02
3 Rayan **AIT-NOURI** (Fra) (19) 06.06.01
5 **MARCAL** (Bra) (31) 19.02.89
15 Willy **BOLY** (Fra) (29) 03.02.91
16 Conor **COADY** (27) 25.02.93
19 JONNY (Spa) (26) 03.03.94
22 Nelson **SEMEDO** (Por) (26) 16.11.93
27 Romain **SAISS** (Mar) (30) 26.03.90
49 Maximilian **KILMAN** (23) 23.05.97
59 Oskar **BUUR** (Den) (22) 31.03.98

MIDFIELDERS
8 Ruben **NEVES** (Por) (23) 13.03.97
20 **VITINHA** (Por) (20) 13.02.00
28 Joao **MOUTINHO** (Por) (34) 08.09.86
32 Leander **DENDONCKER** (Bel) (25) 15.04.95

FORWARDS
7 Pedro **NETO** (Por) (20) 09.03.00
9 Raul **JIMENEZ** (Mex) (29) 05.05.91
10 Daniel **PODENCE** (Por) (25) 21.10.95
17 Fabio **SILVA** (Por) (18) 19.07.02
37 Adama **TRAORE** (Spa) (24) 25.01.96

COACH
Nuno **ESPIRITO SANTO** (Por) (46) 25.01.74

(Ages as of 30/10/20)

SPAIN: LA LIGA 2020-21

ALAVES

GOALKEEPERS
1 Fernando **PACHECO** (28) 18.05.92
13 Antonio **SIVERA** (24) 11.08.96
31 **ARITZ** Castro (22) 20.05.98

DEFENDERS
2 **TACHI** (23) 10.09.97
3 Ruben **DUARTE** (25) 18.10.95
4 Rodrigo **ELY** (Bra) (26) 03.11.93
5 Victor **LAGUARDIA** (30) 05.11.89
17 Adrian **MARIN** (23) 09.01.97
21 **MARTIN** Aguirregabiria (24) 10.05.96
22 Florian **LEJEUNE** (Fra) (29) 20.05.91
23 Ximo **NAVARRO** (30) 23.01.90
26 Javi **LOPEZ** (18) 25.03.02
Tomas **TAVARES** (Por) (19) 07.03.01

MIDFIELDERS
6 Rodrigo **BATTAGLIA** (Arg) (29) 12.07.91
8 Tomas **PINA** (33) 14.10.87
11 LUIS **RIOJA** (27) 16.10.93
19 **MANU** Garcia (34) 26.04.86
20 PERE **PONS** (27) 20.02.93
27 **SERGI** (21) 14.04.99
28 **PEPE** (21) 29.07.99
JOTA Peleteiro (29) 16.06.91

FORWARDS
7 LUCAS **PEREZ** (32) 10.09.88
9 **JOSELU** (30) 27.03.90
10 John **GUIDETTI** (Swe) (28) 15.04.92
14 **DEYVERSON** (Bra) (29) 08.05.91
16 **EDGAR** (30) 02.01.90
18 **BURGUI** (27) 29.10.93
16 Edgar **MENDEZ** (30) 02.01.90
29 Borja **SAINZ** (19) 01.02.01

COACH
Pablo **MACHIN** (45) 07.04.75

ATHLETIC BILBAO

GOALKEEPERS
1 Unai **SIMON** (23) 11.06.97
13 Jokin **EZKIETA** (24) 17.08.96
25 Iago **HERRERIN** (32) 25.01.88

DEFENDERS
3 Unai **NUNEZ** (23) 30.01.97
4 Inigo **MARTINEZ** (29) 17.05.91
5 **YERAY** (25) 24.01.95
15 Inigo **LEKUE** (27) 04.05.93
17 Yuri **BERCHICHE** (30) 10.02.90
18 Oscar **DE MARCOS** (31) 14.04.89
21 Ander **CAPA** (28) 08.02.92
23 Peru **NOLASKOAIN** (22) 25.10.98
24 Mikel **BALENZIAGA** (32) 29.02.88

MIDFIELDERS
6 Mikel **VESGA** (27) 21.05.93
8 Unai **LOPEZ** (25) 30.10.95
14 Dani **GARCIA** (30) 24.05.90
16 Oihan **SANCET** (20) 25.04.00
22 Raul **GARCIA** (34) 11.07.86
27 Unai **VENCEDOR** (19) 15.11.00
28 Oier **ZARRAGA** (21) 04.01.99

FORWARDS
7 Ibai **GOMEZ** (30) 11.11.89
9 Inaki **WILLIAMS** (26) 15.06.94
10 Iker **MUNIAIN** (27) 19.12.92
11 Inigo **CORDOBA** (23) 13.03.97
12 Alex **BERENGUER** (25) 04.07.95
19 Kenan **KODRO** (Bih) (27) 19.08.93
20 Asier **VILLALIBRE** (23) 30.09.97
26 Inigo **VICENTE** (22) 06.01.98
32 Jon **MORCILLO** (22) 15.09.98

COACH
Gaizka **GARITANO** (45) 09.07.75

ATLETICO MADRID

GOALKEEPERS
1 Ivo **GRBIC** (Cro) (24) 18.01.96
13 Jan **OBLAK** (Svn) (27) 07.01.93

DEFENDERS
2 Jose **GIMENEZ** (Uru) (25) 20.01.95
3 Manu **SANCHEZ** (20) 24.08.00
12 Renan **LODI** (Bra) (22) 08.04.98
15 Stefan **SAVIC** (Mne) (29) 08.01.91
18 **FELIPE** (Bra) (31) 16.05.89
22 Mario **HERMOSO** (25) 18.06.95
23 Kieran **TRIPPIER** (Eng) (30) 19.09.90
24 Sime **VRSALJKO** (Cro) (28) 10.01.92

MIDFIELDERS
5 Lucas **TORREIRA** (Uru) (24) 11.02.96
6 **KOKE** (28) 08.01.92
8 **SAUL** (25) 21.11.94
11 Thomas **LEMAR** (Fra) (24) 12.11.95
14 Marcos **LLORENTE** (25) 30.01.95
16 Hector **HERRERA** (Mex) (30) 19.04.90
20 **VITOLO** (30) 02.11.89
21 Yannick **CARRASCO** (Bel) (27) 04.09.93

FORWARDS
7 Joao **FELIX** (Por) (20) 10.11.99
9 Luis **SUAREZ** (Uru) (33) 24.01.87
10 Angel **CORREA** (Arg) (25) 09.03.95
17 Ivan **SAPONJIC** (Srb) (23) 02.08.97
19 Diego **COSTA** (32) 07.10.88

COACH
Diego **SIMEONE** (Arg) (50) 28.04.70

BARCELONA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Marc-Andre **TER STEGEN** (Ger) (28) 30.04.92
13 **NETO** (Bra) (31) 19.07.89

DEFENDERS
2 Sergino **DEST** (USA) (19) 03.11.00
3 Gerard **PIQUE** (33) 02.02.87
4 Ronald **ARAUJO** (Uru) (21) 07.03.99
15 Clement **LENGLET** (Fra) (25) 17.06.95
18 Jordi **ALBA** (31) 21.03.89
20 Sergi **ROBERTO** (28) 07.02.92
23 Samuel **UMTITI** (Fra) (26) 14.11.93
24 Junior **FIRPO** (24) 22.08.96

MIDFIELDERS
5 Sergio **BUSQUETS** (32) 16.07.88
6 Carles **ALENA** (22) 05.01.98
8 Miralem **PJANIC** (Bih) (30) 02.04.90
12 Riqui **PUIG** (21) 13.08.99
14 Philippe **COUTINHO** (Bra) (28) 12.06.92
16 **PEDRI** (17) 25.11.02
19 Matheus **FERNANDES** (Bra) (22) 30.06.98
21 Frenkie **DE JONG** (Ned) (23) 12.05.97

FORWARDS
7 Antoine **GRIEZMANN** (Fra) (29) 21.03.91
9 Martin **BRAITHWAITE** (Den) (29) 05.06.91
10 Lionel **MESSI** (Arg) (33) 24.06.87
11 Ousmane **DEMBELE** (Fra) (23) 15.05.97
17 Francisco **TRINCAO** (Por) (20) 29.12.99
22 Ansu **FATI** (17) 31.10.02

COACH
Ronald **KOEMAN** (Ned) (57) 21.03.63

CADIZ

GOALKEEPERS
1 Jeremias **LEDESMA** (Arg) (27) 13.02.93
13 David **GIL** (26) 11.01.94

DEFENDERS
3 **FALI** (27) 12.08.93
4 Marcos **MAURO** (Arg) (29) 09.01.91
15 Carlos **AKAPO** (Eqg) (27) 12.03.93
16 Juan **CALA** (30) 26.11.89
19 Pedro **ALCALA** (31) 19.03.89
20 **IZA** (27) 23.04.93
22 Alfonso **ESPINO** (Uru) (28) 05.01.92

MIDFIELDERS
2 Jens **JONSSON** (Den) (27) 10.01.93
5 Jon Ander **GARRIDO** (31) 09.10.89
6 Jose **MARI** (32) 06.12.87
7 **SALVI** Sanchez (29) 30.03.91
8 **ALEX** Fernandez (28) 15.10.92
10 Alberto **PEREA** (29) 19.12.90
11 Jorge **POMBO** (26) 22.02.94
12 Yann **BODIGER** (Fra) (25) 09.02.95
14 Ivan **ALEJO** (25) 10.02.95
17 Augusto **FERNANDEZ** (Arg) (34) 10.04.86
25 Jairo **IZQUIERDO** (27) 22.10.93

FORWARDS
9 Anthony **LOZANO** (Hon) (27) 25.04.93
18 Alvaro **NEGREDO** (35) 20.08.85
21 Alvaro **GIMENEZ** (29) 19.05.91
23 **NANO** (25) 05.02.95
24 Filip **MALBASIC** (Srb) (27) 18.11.92
32 Bobby **ADEKANYE** (Ned) (21) 14.02.99

COACH
Alvaro **CERVERA** (Eqg) (55) 20.09.65

CELTA VIGO

GOALKEEPERS
1 Ivan **VILLAR** (23) 09.07.97
13 Ruben **BLANCO** (25) 25.07.95
25 Sergio **ALVAREZ** (34) 03.08.86

DEFENDERS
2 Hugo **MALLO** (29) 22.06.91
4 Nestor **ARAUJO** (Mex) (29) 29.08.91
15 Lucas **OLAZA** (Uru) (26) 21.07.94
16 Jorge **SAENZ** (23) 17.11.96
17 David **JUNCA** (26) 16.11.93
18 Joseph **AIDOO** (Gha) (25) 29.09.95
20 **KEVIN** Vazquez (27) 23.03.93
24 Jeison **MURILLO** (Col) (28) 27.05.92
David **COSTAS** (25) 26.03.95

MIDFIELDERS
5 Okay **YOKUSLU** (Tur) (26) 09.03.94
6 Denis **SUAREZ** (26) 06.01.94
8 Fran **BELTRAN** (21) 03.02.99
14 Renato **TAPIA** (Per) (25) 28.07.95
23 Brais **MENDEZ** (23) 07.01.97
Miguel **BAEZA** (20) 27.03.00

FORWARDS
9 **NOLITO** (34) 15.10.86
10 Iago **ASPAS** (33) 01.08.87
11 Emre **MOR** (23) 24.07.97
22 Santi **MINA** (24) 07.12.95

COACH
OSCAR Garcia Junyent (47) 26.04.73

EIBAR

GOALKEEPERS
1 Marko **DMITROVIC** (Srb) (28) 24.01.92
13 **YOEL** (32) 28.08.88

DEFENDERS
2 Esteban **BURGOS** (Arg) (28) 09.01.92
3 Pedro **BIGAS** (30) 15.05.90
4 Paulo **OLIVEIRA** (Por) (28) 08.01.92
5 Jose **MARTINEZ** (27) 12.02.93
11 Rafa **SOARES** (Por) (25) 09.05.95
15 Jose **ANGEL** (31) 05.09.89
20 Rober **CORREA** (28) 20.09.92
22 Alejandro **POZO** (21) 22.02.99
23 Anaitz **ARBILLA** (33) 15.05.87
24 Kevin **RODRIGUES** (Por) (26) 05.03.94

MIDFIELDERS
6 Sergio **ALVAREZ** (28) 23.01.92
8 Pape **DIOP** (Sen) (34) 19.03.86
10 Edu **EXPOSITO** (24) 01.08.96
14 Takashi **INUI** (Jap) (32) 02.06.88
16 Roberto **OLABE** (24) 05.05.96
18 **RECIO** (29) 11.01.91
19 Damian **KADZIOR** (Pol) (28) 16.06.92
21 Pedro **LEON** (33) 24.11.86

FORWARDS
7 Quique **GONZALEZ** (30) 16.05.90
9 Segri **ENRICH** (30) 26.02.90
12 Yoshinori **MUTO** (Jap) (28) 15.07.92
17 **KIKE** (30) 25.11.89
25 Bryan **GIL** (19) 11.02.01

COACH
Jose Luis **MENDILIBAR** (59) 14.03.61

ELCHE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Diego **RODRIGUEZ** (Arg) (31) 25.06.89
13 Edgar **BADIA** (28) 12.02.92

DEFENDERS
3 Juan Sanchez **MINO** (Arg) (30) 01.01.90
5 Gonzalo **VERDU** (32) 21.10.88
12 Dani **CALVO** (26) 01.04.94
18 Youssouf **KONE** (Mli) (25) 05.07.95
19 Antonio **BARRAGAN** (33) 12.06.87
23 **CIFU** (30) 05.10.90
24 **JOSEMA** (24) 06.06.96

MIDFIELDERS
4 Ivan **MARCONE** (Arg) (30) 03.06.90
6 Omenuke **MFULU** (Cod) (26) 20.03.94
8 Victor **RODRIGUEZ** (31) 23.07.89
10 Pere **MILLA** (28) 23.09.92
11 Tete **MORENTE** (23) 04.12.96
14 Raul **GUTI** (23) 30.12.96
15 **LUISMI** (28) 05.05.92
16 **FIDEL** (21) 27.10.89
17 **JOSAN** (30) 03.12.89

FORWARDS
7 **NINO** (40) 10.06.80
9 Lucas **BOYE** (Arg) (24) 28.02.96
20 Jeison **LUCUMI** (Col) (25) 08.04.95
21 Guido **CARRILLO** (Arg) (29) 25.05.91
22 Emiliano **RIGONI** (Arg) (27) 04.02.93

COACH
Jorge **ALMIRON** (Arg) (49) 19.06.71

GETAFE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Ruben **YANEZ** (27) 12.10.93
13 David **SORIA** (27) 04.04.93
25 Leandro **CHICHIZOLA** (Arg) (30) 27.03.90

DEFENDERS
2 **DJENE** Dakonam (Tog) (28) 31.12.91
3 Erick **CABACO** (Uru) (25) 19.04.95
4 Xabier **ETXEITA** (33) 31.10.87
6 **CHEMA** (28) 03.03.92
12 Allan **NYOM** (Cmr) (32) 10.05.88
15 Marc **CUCURELLA** (22) 22.97.98
17 Mathias **OLIVERA** (Uru) (23) 31.10.97
22 Damian **SUAREZ** (Uru) (32) 27.04.88

MIDFIELDERS
8 Francisco **PORTILLO** (30) 13.06.90
14 Ante **PALAVERSA** (Cro) (20) 06.04.00
18 Mauro **ARAMBARRI** (Uru) (25) 30.09.95
20 Nemanja **MAKSIMOVIC** (Srb) (25) 26.01.95
21 Abdoulay **DIABY** (Mli) (29) 21.05.91
24 David **TIMOR** (31) 17.10.89

FORWARDS
7 Jaime **MATA** (32) 24.10.88
9 **ANGEL** (33) 26.04.87
10 Enes **UNAL** (Tur) (23) 10.05.97
19 Dario **POVEDA** (23) 13.03.97
23 **CUCHO** Hernandes (Col) (21) 22.04.99
26 Victor **MOLLEJO** (19) 21.01.01

COACH
Jose **BORDALAS** (56) 05.03.64

GRANADA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Rui **SILVA** (Por) (26) 07.02.94
13 **AARON** (25) 27.09.95

DEFENDERS
2 Dimitri **FOULQUIER** (Glp) (27) 23.03.93
3 Nehuen **PEREZ** (Arg) (20) 24.06.00
6 **GERMAN** (33) 12.12.86
15 Carlos **NEVA** (24) 12.06.96
16 Victor **DIAZ** (32) 12.06.88
17 **QUINI** (31) 24.09.89
18 Neyder **LOZANO** (Col) (26) 04.03.94
20 Jesus **VALLEJO** (23) 05.01.97
22 Domingos **DUARTE** (Por) (25) 10.03.95

MIDFIELDERS
4 Maxime **GONALONS** (Fra) (31) 10.03.89
5 Luis **MILLA** (26) 07.10.94
8 Yan **ETEKI** (Cmr) (23) 26.08.97
12 Ramon **AZEEZ** (Nga) (27) 12.12.92
14 Fede **VICO** (26) 04.07.94
19 Angel **MONTORO** (32) 25.06.88
21 Yangel **HERRERA** (Ven) (22) 07.01.98
24 **KENEDY** (Bra) (24) 08.02.96
26 Alberto **SORO** (21) 09.03.99

FORWARDS
7 Luis **SUAREZ** (Col) (22) 02.12.97
9 Roberto **SOLDADO** (35) 27.05.85
10 Antonio **PUERTAS** (28) 21.02.92
11 Darwin **MACHIS** (Ven) (27) 07.02.93
23 Jorge **MOLINA** (38) 22.04.82

COACH
Diego **MARTINEZ** (39) 16.12.80

HUESCA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Alvaro **FERNANDEZ** (22) 13.04.98
25 Andres **FERNANDEZ** (33) 17.12.86
30 Antonio **VALERA** (24) 17.08.96

DEFENDERS

3 Pablo **MAFFEO** (23) 12.07.97
4 Pablo **INSUA** (27) 09.09.93
11 Javi **GALAN** (25) 19.11.94
14 Jorge **PULIDO** (29) 08.04.91
16 **LUISINHO** (Por) (35) 05.05.85
18 Dimitris **SIOVAS** (Gre) (32) 16.09.88
19 PEDRO **LOPEZ** (36) 01.11.83
22 GASTON **SILVA** (Uru) (26) 05.03.94

MIDFIELDERS

5 Pedro **MOSQUERA** (32) 21.04.88
7 David **FERREIRO** (32) 01.04.88
8 **EUGENI** (26) 19.07.94
10 Sergio **GOMEZ** (20) 04.09.00
15 Javi **ONTIVEROS** (23) 09.09.97
17 Mikel **RICO** (35) 04.11.84
20 Jaime **SEOANE** (23) 23.01.97
21 Juan **CARLOS** (29) 15.03.91
24 Borja **GARCIA** (29) 02.11.90
26 Kelechi **NWAKALI** (Nga) (22) 05.06.98
Idrissa **DOUMBIA** (Civ) (22) 14.04.98

FORWARDS

9 Rafa **MIR** (23) 18.06.97
12 Shinji **OKAZAKI** (Jap) (34) 16.04.86
23 Dani **ESCRICHE** (22) 24.03.98
Sandro **RAMIREZ** (25) 09.07.95

COACH

MICHEL (45) 30.10.75

LEVANTE

GOALKEEPERS

1 **KOKE** Vegas (25) 27.09.95
13 Aitor **FERNANDEZ** (29) 03.05.91
34 Dani **CARDENAS** (23) 28.03.97

DEFENDERS

2 **SON** (26) 30.03.94
3 **TONO** (30) 07.11.89
4 Rober **PIER** (25) 16.02.95
6 Oscar **DUARTE** (Crc) (31) 03.06.89
14 Ruben **VEZO** (Por) (26) 25.04.94
15 Sergio **POSTIGO** (31) 04.11.88
19 Carlos **CLERC** (28) 21.02.92
20 Jorge **MIRAMON** (31) 02.06.89
23 **COKE** (33) 26.04.87

MIDFIELDERS

5 Nemanja **RADOJA** (Srb) (27) 06.02.93
10 Enis **BARDHI** (Mkd) (25) 02.07.95
12 Mickael **MALSA** (Mtq) (25) 12.10.95
16 Ruben **ROCHINA** (29) 23.03.91
17 Nikola **VUKCEVIC** (Mne) (28) 13.12.91
22 Gonzalo **MELERO** (26) 02.01.94
24 Jose **CAMPANA** (27) 31.05.93
25 Cheick **DOUKOURE** (Civ) (28) 11.09.92

FORWARDS

7 Sergio **LEON** (31) 06.01.89
8 **HERNANI** (Por) (29) 20.08.91
9 ROGER **Marti** (29) 03.01.91
11 Jose Luis **MORALES** (33) 23.07.87
18 Jorge **DE FRUTOS** (23) 20.02.97
21 Dani **GOMEZ** (22) 30.07.98

COACH

Paco **LOPEZ** (53) 19.09.67

OSASUNA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Sergio **HERRERA** (27) 05.06.93
13 **RUBEN** Martinez (36) 22.06.84
25 Juan **PEREZ** (24) 15.07.96

DEFENDERS

2 Nacho **VIDAL** (25) 24.01.95
3 Juan **CRUZ** (28) 28.07.92
4 Unai **GARCIA** (28) 03.09.92
5 David **GARCIA** (26) 14.02.94
12 Facundo **RONCAGLIA** (Arg) (33) 10.02.87
22 Raul **NAVAS** (32) 11.05.88
23 **ARIDANE** (31) 23.03.89
30 Gorka **ZABARTE** (21) 09.01.99
31 Jorge **HERRANDO** (19) 28.02.01

MIDFIELDERS

6 **OIER** (34) 25.05.86
7 **JONY** (29) 09.07.91
8 Darko **BRASANAC** (Srb) (28) 12.02.92
10 Roberto **TORRES** (31) 07.03.89
11 Kike **BARJA** (23) 01.04.97
14 Ruben **GARCIA** (27) 14.07.93
21 Inigo **PEREZ** (32) 18.01.88
24 Lucas **TORRO** (26) 19.07.94
27 Jon **MONCAYOLA** (22) 13.05.98
28 Javi **MARTINEZ** (20) 22.12.99
29 Aimar **OROZ** (18) 27.11.01
32 Asier **CORDOBA** (20) 31.03.00
37 Kike **SAVERIO** (21) 19.06.99

FORWARDS

9 Chimy **AVILA** (Arg) (26) 06.02.94
16 Jonathan **CALLERI** (Arg) (27) 23.09.93
19 Enric **GALLEGO** (34) 12.09.86
20 Adrian **LOPEZ** (32) 08.01.88
Ante **BUDIMIR** (Cro) (29) 22.07.91
BRANDON (25) 04.02.95

COACH

Jagoba **ARRASATE** (42) 22.04.78

REAL BETIS

GOALKEEPERS

1 Joel **ROBLES** (30) 17.06.90
13 Dani **MARTIN** (22) 08.07.98
25 Claudio **BRAVO** (Chi) (37) 13.04.83

DEFENDERS

2 Martin **MONTOYA** (29) 14.04.91
5 Marc **BARTRA** (29) 15.01.91
6 Victor **RUIZ** (31) 25.01.89
12 **SIDNEI** (Bra) (31) 23.08.89
15 Alex **MORENO** (27) 08.06.93
22 **EMERSON** (Bra) (21) 14.01.99
23 Aissa **MANDI** (Alg) (29) 22.10.91
33 Juan **MIRANDA** (20) 19.01.00
Francis **GUERRERO** (24) 11.03.96

MIDFIELDERS

3 Victor **CAMARASA** (26) 28.05.94
4 Paul **AKOUOKOU** (Civ) (22) 20.12.97
8 Nabil **FEKIR** (Fra) (27) 18.07.93
10 Sergio **CANALES** (29) 16.02.91
14 William **CARVALHO** (Por) (28) 07.04.92
17 **JOAQUIN** (39) 21.07.81
18 Andres **GUARDADO** (Mex) (34) 28.09.86
20 Diego **LAINEZ** (Mex) (20) 09.06.00
21 Guido **RODRIGUEZ** (Arg) (26) 12.04.94

FORWARDS

7 **JUANMI** (27) 20.05.93
9 Borja **IGLESIAS** (27) 17.01.93
11 Cristian **TELLO** (29) 11.08.91
16 **LOREN MORON** (26) 30.12.93
19 Antonio **SANABRIA** (Par) (24) 04.03.96
24 Aitor **RUIBAL** (24) 22.03.96

COACH

Manuel **PELLEGRINI** (Chi) (67) 16.09.53

REAL MADRID

GOALKEEPERS

1 Thibaut **COURTOIS** (Bel) (28) 11.05.92
13 Andriy **LUNIN** (Ukr) (21) 11.02.99

DEFENDERS

2 Dani **CARVAJAL** (28) 11.01.92
3 EDER **MILITAO** (Bra) (22) 18.01.98
4 Sergio **RAMOS** (34) 30.03.86
5 Raphael **VARANE** (Fra) (27) 25.04.93
6 **NACHO** (30) 18.01.90
12 **MARCELO** (Bra) (32) 12.05.88
19 Alvaro **ODRIOZOLA** (24) 14.12.95
23 Ferland **MENDY** (Fra) (25) 08.06.95

MIDFIELDERS

8 Toni **KROOS** (Ger) (30) 04.01.90
10 Luka **MODRIC** (Cro) (35) 09.09.85
14 **CASEMIRO** (Bra) (28) 23.02.92
15 Federico **VALVERDE** (Uru) (22) 22.07.98
21 Martin **ODEGAARD** (Nor) (21) 17.12.98
22 **ISCO** (28) 21.04.92

FORWARDS

7 Eden **HAZARD** (Bel) (29) 07.01.91
9 Karim **BENZEMA** (Fra) (32) 19.12.87
11 Marco **ASENSIO** (24) 21.01.96
17 Lucas **VAZQUEZ** (29) 01.07.91
18 Luka **JOVIC** (Srb) (22) 23.12.97
20 **VINICIUS** Jr (Bra) (20) 12.07.00
24 **MARIANO** (27) 01.08.93
25 **RODRYGO** (Bra) (19) 09.01.01

COACH

Zinedine **ZIDANE** (Fra) (48) 23.06.72

REAL SOCIEDAD

GOALKEEPERS

1 Alex **REMIRO** (25) 24.03.95
13 Miguel Angel **MOYA** (36) 02.04.84

DEFENDERS

2 Joseba **ZALDUA** (28) 24.06.92
6 Aritz **ELUSTONDO** (26) 28.03.94
12 Aihen **MUNOZ** (23) 16.08.97
15 Modibo **SAGNAN** (Fra) (21) 14.04.99
18 Andoni **GOROSABEL** (24) 04.08.96
20 Nacho **MONREAL** (34) 26.02.86
24 Robin **LE NORMAND** (Fra) (23) 11.11.96

MIDFIELDERS

4 Asier **ILLARRAMENDI** (30) 08.03.90
5 Igor **ZUBELDIA** (23) 30.03.97
7 **PORTU** (28) 21.05.92
8 Mikel **MERINO** (24) 22.06.96
11 Adnan **JANUZAJ** (Bel) (25) 05.02.95
14 Jon **GURIDI** (25) 28.02.95
16 Ander **GUEVARA** (23) 07.07.97
17 Martin **MERQUELANZ** (25) 12.06.95
21 David **SILVA** (34) 08.01.86
23 Luca **SANGALLI** (25) 10.02.95
28 Roberto **LOPEZ** (20) 24.04.00
36 Martin **ZUBIMENDI** (21) 02.02.99

FORWARDS

9 WILLIAN **JOSE** (Bra) (28) 23.11.91
10 Mikel **OYARZABAL** (23) 21.04.97
19 Alexander **ISAK** (Swe) (21) 21.09.99
22 Ander **BARRENETXEA** (18) 27.12.01
25 Jon **BAUTISTA** (25) 03.07.95

COACH

Imanol **ALGUACIL** (49) 04.07.71

REAL VALLADOLID

GOALKEEPERS

1 Jordi **MASIP** (31) 03.01.89
13 **ROBERTO** (34) 10.02.86

DEFENDERS

2 Luis **PEREZ** (25) 04.02.95
3 Raul **CARNERO** (31) 30.04.89
4 Kiko **OLIVAS** (32) 21.08.88
5 Javi **SANCHEZ** (23) 14.03.97
6 Bruno **GONZALEZ** (30) 24.05.90
15 Jawad **EL YAMIQ** (Mar) (28) 29.02.92
18 Saidy **JANKO** (Sui) (25) 22.10.95
22 **NACHO** (31) 07.03.89
24 **JOAQUIN** (24) 31.05.96

MIDFIELDERS

8 Kike **PEREZ** (23) 14.02.97
11 Pablo **HERVIAS** (27) 08.03.93
12 Fabian **ORELLANA** (Chi) (34) 27.01.86
14 Ruben **ALCARAZ** (29) 01.05.91
17 Roque **MESA** (31) 07.06.89
19 Toni **VILLA** (25) 07.01.95
20 **FEDE** San Emeterio (23) 16.03.97
21 **MICHEL** (32) 29.07.88
JOTA (Por) (21) 30.03.99

FORWARDS

7 Sergi **GUARDIOLA** (29) 29.05.91
9 Shon **WEISSMAN** (Isr) (24) 14.02.96
10 Oscar **PLANO** (29) 11.02.91
16 Marcos **ANDRE** (Bra) (24) 20.10.96
23 Waldo **RUBIO** (25) 17.08.95

COACH

Sergio **GONZALEZ** (43) 10.11.76

SEVILLA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Tomas **VACLIK** (Cze) (31) 29.03.89
13 **BONO** (Mar) (29) 05.04.91
31 Javi **DIAZ** (23) 15.05.97

DEFENDERS

2 Joris **GNAGNON** (Fra) (23) 13.01.1997
3 Sergi **GOMEZ** (28) 28.03.92
4 Karim **REKIK** (Ned) (25) 02.12.94
12 Jules **KOUNDE** (Fra) (21) 12.11.98
16 Jesus **NAVAS** (34) 21.11.85
17 Aleix **VIDAL** (31) 21.08.1989
18 Sergio **ESCUDERO** (31) 02.09.89
19 Marcos **ACUNA** (Arg) (29) 28.10.91
20 Diego **CARLOS** (Bra) (27) 15.03.93
40 Pablo **PEREZ** (19) 18.08.01

MIDFIELDERS

6 Nemanja **GUDELJ** (Srb) (28) 16.11.91
8 Joan **JORDAN** (26) 06.07.94
10 Ivan **RAKITIC** (Cro) (32) 10.03.88
14 **OSCAR** (22) 28.06.98
21 Oliver **TORRES** (25) 10.11.94
22 Franco **VAZQUEZ** (Arg) (31) 22.02.89
25 **FERNANDO** (Bra) (33) 25.07.87

FORWARDS

5 Lucas **OCAMPOS** (Arg) (26) 11.07.94
7 **SUSO** (26) 19.11.93
9 Luuk **DE JONG** (Ned) (30) 27.08.90
11 **MUNIR** (Mar) (25) 01.09.95
15 Youssef **EN-NESYRI** (Mar) (23) 01.06.97
23 Oussama **IDRISSI** (Mar) (24) 26.02.96
24 Carlos **FERNANDEZ** (24) 22.05.96

COACH

Julen **LOPETEGUI** (54) 28.08.66

VALENCIA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Jaume **DOMENECH** (29) 05.11.90
13 Jasper **CILLESSEN** (Ned) (31) 22.04.89
25 Cristian **RIVERO** (22) 21.03.98

DEFENDERS

2 Thierry **CORREIA** (Por) (21) 09.03.99
3 Toni **LATO** (22) 21.11.97
4 Eliaquim **MANGALA** (Fra) (29) 13.02.91
5 **GABRIEL** Paulista (Bra) (29) 26.11.90
12 Mouctar **DIAKHABY** (Fra) (23) 19.12.96
14 Jose **GAYA** (25) 25.05.95
15 Hugo **GUILLAMON** (20) 31.01.00

MIDFIELDERS

6 Geoffrey **KONDOGBIA** (Cta) (27) 15.02.93
8 Carlos **SOLER** (23) 02.01.97
18 Daniel **WASS** (Den) (31) 31.05.89
19 Uros **RACIC** (Srb) (22) 17.03.98
20 Lee **KANG-IN** (Kor) (19) 19.02.01
23 **JASON** (26) 06.07.94

FORWARDS

7 Goncalo **GUEDES** (Por) (23) 29.11.96
9 Kevin **GAMEIRO** (Fra) (33) 09.05.87
11 Ruben **SOBRINO** (28) 01.06.92
17 Denis **CHERYSHEV** (Rus) (29) 26.12.90
21 Manu **VALLEJO** (23) 14.02.97
22 Maxi **GOMEZ** (Uru) (24) 14.08.96

COACH

Javi **GRACIA** (50) 01.05.70

VILLARREAL

GOALKEEPERS

1 Sergio **ASENJO** (31) 28.06.89
13 Geronimo **RULLI** (Arg) (28) 20.05.92

DEFENDERS

2 Mario **GASPAR** (29) 24.11.90
3 Raul **ALBIOL** (35) 04.09.85
4 Pau **TORRES** (23) 16.01.97
6 Ramiro **FUNES MORI** (Arg) (29) 05.03.91
8 Juan **FOYTH** (Arg) (22) 12.01.98
15 Pervis **ESTUPINAN** (Ecu) (22) 21.01.98
18 Alberto **MORENO** (28) 05.07.92
20 Ruben **PENA** (29) 18.07.91
21 Jaume **COSTA** (32) 18.03.88
22 Sofian **CHAKLA (Mar)** (27) 02.09.93
24 Alfonso **PEDRAZA** 24) 09.04.96

MIDFIELDERS

5 Dani **PAREJO** (31) 16.04.89
10 Vicente **IBORRA** (32) 16.01.88
11 Samuel **CHUKWUEZE** (Nga) (21) 22.05.99
14 Manu **TRIGUEROS** (29) 17.10.91
16 Takefusa **KUBO** (Jap) (19) (04.06.01)
19 Francis **COQUELIN** (Fra) (29) 13.05.91
23 Moi **GOMEZ** (26) 23.06.94

FORWARDS

7 Gerard **MORENO** (28) 07.04.92
9 Carlos **BACCA** (Col) (34) 08.09.86
12 Dani **RABA** (25) 29.10.95
17 Paco **ALCACER** (27) 30.08.93

COACH

Unai **EMERY** (48) 03.11.71

(Ages as of 30.10.20)

Internationals

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

Group A1

Oct 11 - Zenica
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
Netherlands 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kovacs (Hun)
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic - Todorovic, Hadzikadunic, Sanicanin, Kadusic (Kolasinac 46), Cimirot, Tatar (Hadziahmetovic 54), Pjanic (Loncar 75), Krunic (Hodzic 75), Gojak, Djuric (Dzeko 61).
Netherlands: Cillessen - Dumfries (Hateboer 70), De Vrij, Van Dijk, Blind (Ake 86), De Roon, F. De Jong, Malen (Berghuis 69), Wijnaldum, Promes (Babel 86), L. De Jong.

Oct 11 - Gdansk
Poland 0
Italy 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sanchez Martinez (Spa)
Poland: Fabianski - Kedziora, Glik, Walukiewicz, Bereszynski, Krychowiak, Moder, Szymanski (Grosicki 59), Klich (Milik 70), Jozwiak (Karbownik 83), Lewandowski (Linetty 82).
Italy: Donnarumma - Florenzi, Bonucci, Acerbi, Emerson, Barella (Locatelli 79), Jorginho, Verratti, Chiesa (Kean 70), Belotti (Caputo 83), Pellegrini (Berardi 83).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Netherlands	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Poland	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Bosnia & Herz.	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

Group A2

Oct 11 - London
England 2 (Rashford 39 pen, Mount 64)
Belgium 1 (Lukaku 16 pen)
HT: 1-1. Ref: Stieler (Ger)
England: Pickford - Walker, Dier, Maguire, Alexander-Arnold (James 79), Henderson (Phillips 66), Rice, Trippier, Mount (Sancho 89), Rashford, Calvert-Lewin (Kane 66).
Belgium: Mignolet - Alderweireld, Boyata, Denayer, Meunier, Witsel, Tielemans, Castagne, De Bruyne (Verschaeren 73), Carrasco (Doku 83), Lukaku.

Oct 11 - Reykjavik
Iceland 0
Denmark 3 (Sigurjonsson 45 og, Eriksen 46, Skov 61)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pandzic (Swe)
Iceland: Halldorsson - Palsson, Ingason, R. Sigurdsson (Eyjolfsson 73), Magnusson, Traustason (Gudmundsson 68), Gunnarsson (Anderson 45), Sigurjonsson, Bjarnason, G. Sigurdsson, Finnbogason (Bodvarsson 12).
Denmark: Schmeichel - Wass, Kjaer, Christensen, Skov (Maehle 79), Hojbjerg, Delaney, Poulsen (Skov Olsen 66), Eriksen, Braithwaite (M. Jorgensen 87), Dolberg (Sisto 79).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Belgium	3	2	0	1	8	3	6
Denmark	3	1	1	1	3	2	4
Iceland	3	0	0	3	1	9	0

Group A3

Oct 11 - Zagreb
Croatia 2 (Vlasic 31, Kramaric 84)
Sweden 1 (Berg 66)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Beaton (Sco)
Croatia: Livakovic - Uremovic, Lovren, Caleta-Car, Melnjak (Kramaric 75), Brozovic, Kovacic (Pasalic 61), Vlasic, Modric, Perisic (Petkovic 85), Brekalo (Bradaric 74).
Sweden: Olsen - Lustig, Jansson, Lindelof, Augustinsson, Kulusevski, Olsson, Ekdal (Larsson 83), Forsberg, Isak (Claesson 65), Berg.

Oct 11 - Saint-Denis
France 0
Portugal 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Del Cerro (Spa)
France: Lloris - Pavard, Varane, Kimpembe, Hernandez, Kante, Pogba, Rabiot, Griezmann, Giroud (Martial 74), Mbappe (Coman 84).
Portugal: Rui Patricio - Nelson Semedo, Pepe, Ruben Dias, Guerreiro (Joao Cancelo 89), Bruno Fernandes (Sanches 80), Danilo, Carvalho (Joao Moutinho 88), Bernardo Silva (Jota 61), Joao Felix (Trincao 89), Ronaldo.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
France	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Croatia	3	1	0	2	5	9	3
Sweden	3	0	0	3	1	5	0

Group A4

Oct 10 - Kiev
Ukraine 1 (Malinovskiy 76 pen)
Germany 2 (Ginter 20, Goretzka 49)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Grinfeld (Isr)
Ukraine: Bushchan - Karavayev, Zabarnyi, Mykolenko, Sobol, Sydorchuk (Makarenko 84), Yarmolenko (Marlos 69), Malinovskiy, Kovalenko (Shaparenko 77), Tsyhankov (Zubkov 69), Yaremchuk.
Germany: Neuer - Ginter, Sule, Rudiger, Klostermann (Can 90), Kimmich, Kroos, Halstenberg, Goretzka, Draxler (Werner 80), Gnabry (Havertz 90+3).

Oct 10 - Madrid
Spain 1 (Oyarzabal 14)
Switzerland 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Palabiyik (Tur)
Spain: De Gea - Navas, Ramos, P. Torres, Gaya, Busquets, Merino, F. Torres (Rodri 88), Olmo (Canales 57), Fati (Traore 57), Oyarzabal (Moreno 73).
Switzerland: Sommer - Widmer (Gavranovic 86), Elvedi, Schar, Rodriguez, Benito (Zuber 81), Sow (Vargas 60), Xhaka, Freuler (Fernandes 86), Seferovic, Mehmedi (Shaqiri 60).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP A4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Germany	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Ukraine	3	1	0	2	3	7	3
Switzerland	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Group B1

Oct 11 - Oslo
Norway 4 (Haaland 13, 64, 74, Sorloth 39)
Romania 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kruzliak (Svk)
Norway: Jarstein - Elabdellaoui (Svensson 79), Strandberg, Ajer, Meling, Odegaard (Linnes 70), Berge, Normann (Midtsjo 70), Elyounoussi (Hauge 85), Haaland (King 79), Sorloth.
Romania: Tatarusanu - Manea, Andonie Burca, Tosca, Bancu, Cicaldau (Stanciu 75), Cretu (Maxim 75), Marin, Iancu (Alibec 90+1), Puscas (Keseru 64), Hagi (Mitrita 64).

Oct 11 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 0
Austria 1 (Gregoritsch 42)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ardeleanu (Cze)
Northern Ireland: McGovern - McLaughlin, Cathcart, J. Evans, Lewis, Davis (C. Evans 73), Dallas (Thompson 73), Whyte (Boyce 84), McNair (Magennis 83), Jones, Lafferty (Washington 61).
Austria: Pervan - Lainer, Dragovic, Hinteregger, Alaba, Ranftl (Trimmel 73), Ilsanker, Baumgartlinger, Baumgartner, Gregoritsch (Grbic 80), Schlager.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Norway	3	2	0	1	10	3	6
Romania	3	1	1	1	4	7	4
Northern Ireland	3	0	1	2	2	7	1

Group B2

Oct 11 - Haifa
Israel 1 (Zahavi 55)
Czech Republic 2 (Abu Hanna 14 og, Vydra 47)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Martins (Por)
Israel: Marciano - Dasa (Dabbur 75), Yeini, Tibi, Elhamed, Abu Hanna (Menachem 45), Abu Fani (Zarzev 88), Natcho (Golasa 75), Solomon, Weissman (Saba 66), Zahavi.
Czech Republic: Vaclik - Coufal, Celustka, Kudela, Boril, Soucek, Kral, Masopust (Kaderabek 68), Darida (Holes 88), Provod (Petrasek 90+3), Vydra (Sevcik 68).

Oct 11 - Glasgow
Scotland 1 (Dykes 54)
Slovakia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Massa (Ita)
Scotland: Marshall - McTominay, Gallagher, Considine, O'Donnell, Fleck (McGregor 72), McGinn (Jack 89), McLean, Robertson, Dykes (McBurnie 72), Fraser (Paterson 85).
Slovakia: Kuciak - Koscelnik, Ninaj, Valjent, Holubek, Bero (Duda 22), Gregus, Hamsik (Kucka 62), Schranz (Mak 62), Bozenik (Safranko 76), Haraslin (Rusnak 76).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scotland	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Czech Republic	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Israel	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Slovakia	3	0	1	2	2	5	1

Group B3

Oct 11 - Belgrade
Serbia 0
Hungary 1 (Konyves 20)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Scharer (Sui)
Serbia: Rajkovic - Milenkovic, Mitrovic, Pavlovic, Gacinovic (Vlahovic 66), Milivojevic (Lukic 45), Gudelj, Ljajic (Radonjic 45), Mladenovic, Jovic, Tadic.
Hungary: Gulacsi - Botka, Lang, At. Szalai, Bese (Orban 56), Gazdag (Schafer 76), Nagy, Kalmar, Hangya (Holender 45), Konyves (Ad. Szalai 64), Nikolic (Nego 76).

Oct 11 - Moscow
Russia 1 (An. Miranchuk 28)
Turkey 1 (Karaman 62)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jug (Svn)
Russia: Shunin - Karavayev, Semenov, Kudryashov, Zhirkov, Zobnin, Ozdoyev, Ionov (Mostovoy 71, Fornin 90+1), An. Miranchuk (Gazinskiy 70), Kuzyaev (Cheryshev 59), Dzyuba.
Turkey: Gunok - Zeki Celik, Kabak, Demiral, Meras, Tufan, Tekdemir (Yokuslu 80), Karaca (Under 45), Calhanoglu (Yazici 90+3), Karaman (Omur 81), Yilmaz (Unal 90+3).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Russia	3	2	1	0	7	4	7
Hungary	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Turkey	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Serbia	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Oct 11 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 0
Wales 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - Doherty, Duffy, Long (Christie 25), Stevens, Molumby (Cullen 90), Hourihane, Brady (Horgan 73), Hendrick, McClean, Long (Maguire 74). *Sent off: McClean 83.*
Wales: Hennessey - Roberts, Ampadu, Rodon, Davies, H. Wilson (N. Williams 67), Smith (Levitt 67), Morrell, James (Brooks 77), Ramsey, Moore.

Oct 11 - Helsinki
Finland 2 (Taylor 52, Jensen 67)
Bulgaria 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lambrechts (Bel)
Finland: Hradecky - Raitala, Toivio, Arajuuri, Uronen, Niskanen (Alho 87), Sparv, Kamara, Taylor (Soiri 74), Pukki (Karjalainen 87), Pohjanpalo (Jensen 65).
Bulgaria: Lukov - Popov, Dimitrov, Georgiev Bozhikov, Nedyalkov (Velkovski 60), Malinov, Tsvetkov (Karabelyov 75), Iliev (Nedelev 75), Despodov, Isa Mustafa (Kraev 60), Yomov.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP B4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wales	3	2	1	0	2	0	7
Finland	3	2	0	1	3	1	6
Republic of Ireland	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Bulgaria	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Group C1

Oct 10 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 2 (Sinani 12, 26)
Cyprus 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Robertson (Sco)
Luxembourg: Moris - Jans, Selimovic (Martins Santos da Graca 69), Gerson, Carlson, Barreiro Martins, V. Thill, O. Thill, Pinto (Bensi 68), Sinani (Skenderovic 79), Rodrigues.
Cyprus: Kyriakides - Kousoulos, Karo (Gogic 60), Laifis, Wheeler (Ioannou 53), Christofi, Artymatas (Kyriakou 75), Kastanos, Pittas (Loizou 75), Sotiriou, Tzionis (Antoniou 45).

Oct 10 - Podgorica
Montenegro 2 (Jovetic 9, Ivanovic 71)
Azerbaijan 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** De Burgos Bengoetxea (Spa)
Montenegro: Mijatovic - Raspopovic, Vujacic, Simic, Radunovic, Vukcevic (Raickovic 81), Bakic (Kosovic 63), Boljevic (Ivanovic 71), Jovetic (Jankovic 80), Haksabanovic, Islamovic (Beqiraj 71).
Azerbaijan: Oglu Balayev - Huseynov, Mustafazade, Krivotsyuk, Medvedev (Salahli 45), Alasgarov (Abbasov 80), Jamalov, Qarayev (Diniyev 60), Huseynov, Ghorbani (Seydaev 60), Sadikhov (Hajiyev 61).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montenegro	3	3	0	0	5	0	9
Luxembourg	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Azerbaijan	3	1	0	2	2	4	3
Cyprus	3	0	0	3	0	5	0

Group C2

Oct 11 - Tallinn
Estonia 3 (Sappinen 33, 61, Liivak 76 pen)
North Macedonia 3 (Kuusk 3 og, Pandev 80, Zajkov 87)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Al-Hakim (Swe)
Estonia: Hein - Teniste, Baranov, Kuusk, Pikk, Luts (Marin 34), Kreida, Kait (Ainsalu 85), Sinyavskiy (Lilander 85), Vassiljev (Liivak 70), Sappinen (Lepik 70).
North Macedonia: Siskovski - Ristovski, Zajkov, Ristevski, Alioski, Nikolov (Pandev 64), Spirovski, Kostadinov (Stojanovski 76), Hasani (Bardhi 45), Trajkovski (Velkoski 76), Trickovski (Nestorovski 64).

Oct 11 - Tychy
Armenia 2 (Bayramyan 6, Mkhitaryan 89 pen)
Georgia 2 (Kacharava 46, Okriashvili 74)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Bebek (Cro)
Armenia: Yurchenko - K. Hovhannisyan (Kadimyan 81), Haroyan, Calisir, A. Hovhannisyan, Angulo (Gareginyan 67), Grigoryan, Barseghyan (Bichakhchyan 90), Mkhitaryan, Bayramyan, Karapetian (Babayan 67).
Georgia: Makaridze - Jigauri, Kobakhidze, Grigalava, Navalovski, Kankava (Kvekveskiri 76), Aburjania (Daushvili 76), Shengelia (Lobzhanidze 80), Gvilia (Okriashvili 61), Qazaishvili, Kacharava (Lobjanidze 80).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N. Macedonia	3	1	2	0	6	5	5
Georgia	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Armenia	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Estonia	3	0	1	2	3	6	1

Group C3

Oct 11 - Pristina
Kosovo 0
Slovenia 1 (Vuckic 22)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Madley (Eng)
Kosovo: Muric - Hadergjonaj, Dresevic, Aliti, Paqarada, Berisha, Shala (Muslija 84), Zhegrova (Hasani 90+1), Celina, Zeneli (Kastrati 78), Kololli (Rashani 84).
Slovenia: Oblak - Stojanovic, Blazic, Mevlja, Balkovec, Rep (Bohar 55), Bijol, Kurtic, Verbic (Skubic 75), Lovric (Vetrih 85), Vuckic (Kramer 85).

Oct 11 - Athens
Greece 2 (Bakasetas 45+3 pen, Mantalos 50)
Moldova 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Higler (Ned)
Greece: Vlachodimos - Chatzidiakos (Rota 69), Svarnas, Tzavellas, Giannoulis, Kourbelis (Bouchalakis 83), Zeca, Limnios (Pelkas 76), Bakasetas, Mantalos (Fortounis 70), Pavlidis (Fountas 83).
Moldova: Namasco - Platica, Mudrac, Posmac, Armas, Reabciuk, Rata (Marandici 66), Ociuc, Calmacov (Epureanu 46), Nicolaescu (Milinceanu 58), Ionita (Racu 76). *Sent off: Posmac 45.*

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Slovenia	3	2	1	0	2	0	7
Kosovo	3	0	1	2	2	4	1
Moldova	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Group C4

Oct 11 - Almaty
Kazakhstan 0
Albania 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Muntean (Rou)
Kazakhstan: Pokalitov - Marochkin (Beysebekov 45), Erlanov, Kerimzhanov, Tagybergen, Bystrov, Kuat (Pertsukh 69), Abiken, Suyumbayev, Aimbetov (Fedin 70), Zainutdinov (Zhaksylykov 86).
Albania: Berisha - Veseli, Djimsiti, Dermaku, Kumbulla, Trashi (Memolla 82), Bare, Abrashi (Laci 86), Kallaku, Broja, Manaj (Seferi Sulejmanov 82).

Oct 11 - Vilnius
Lithuania 2 (Novikovas 7, Laukzemis 75)
Belarus 2 (Lisakovich 59 pen, Sachivko 66)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Weinberger (Aut)
Lithuania: Svedkauskas - Mikolunas, Palionis, Girdvainis, Vaitkunas (Beneta 64), Simkus (Dapkus 72), Novikovas (Chernykh 72), Vorobjovas, Sirgedas (Golubickas 72), Lasickas, Kazlauskas (Laukzemis 60).
Belarus: Khatkevich - Zolotov, Martynovich, Sachivko, Pechenin, Yuzepchuk (Podstrelov 69), Maevski, Ebong (Khachaturyan 80), Stasevich (Bakhar 80), Gromyko (Lisakovich 57), Skavysh (Laptev 57).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP C4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kazakhstan	3	1	1	1	3	2	4
Albania	3	1	1	1	2	1	4
Belarus	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Lithuania	3	1	1	1	3	4	4

Group D1

Oct 10 - Torshavn
Faroe Islands 1 (Faero 28)
Latvia 1 (Ikaunieks 25)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Stoyanov (Bul)
Faroe Islands: Gestsson - Rolantsson (Danielsen 82), Faero, Nattestad, Davidsen, Vatnhamar (Baldvinsson 65), Bjartalid (Johannesen 82), Hansson, Hendriksson Olsen (Vatnhamar 11), Andrasson Olsen, Lava Olsen (Edmundsson 65).
Latvia: Steinbors - Savalnieks, Oss, Stuglis, Rugins, Tobers (Karklins 68), Zjuzins (Emsis 82), Jaunzems (Kigurs 68), Ikaunieks, Ciganiks, Uldrikis (Krollis 82).

Oct 10 - Andorra la Vella
Andorra 0
Malta 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Durieux (Lux)
Andorra: Gomes - Rubio, Garcia, Vales, Cervos Moro, Martinez (Garcia 85), Pujol, Vieira de Vasconcelos, Martinez (Bernat 90+4), Sanchez (San Nicolas 85), Fernandez (Alaez 70).
Malta: Bonello - Borg, Agius, Muscat, Mbong, Pisani (Kristensen 79), Teuma, Camenzuli, Degabriele (Montebello 61), Gambin, Mbong (Grech 79).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP D1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Faroe Islands	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Latvia	3	0	3	0	2	2	3
Malta	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Andorra	3	0	2	1	0	1	2

Group D2

Oct 10 - Vaduz
Liechtenstein 0
Gibraltar 1 (De Barr 10)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Levnikov (Rus)
Liechtenstein: Buchel - Wolfinger (Brandle), Malin, Hofer, Goppel, Buchel, Sele (Frommelt 46), Kuhne (Ospelt 85), Hasler, Salanovic, Wolfinger (Yildiz 46).
Gibraltar: Goldwin, Sergeant, Wiseman, Mouelhi, Mascarenhas-Olivero, Torrilla, Annesley, Casciaro (Jolley 74), Walker, Badr Hassan (Pons 87), De Barr (Styche 71).

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE GROUP D2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gibraltar	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Liechtenstein	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
San Marino	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

EURO 2020 PLAY-OFF SEMI-FINALS

Path A

Oct 8 - Sofia
Bulgaria 1 (Yomov 89)
Hungary 3 (Orban 17, Kalmar 47, Nikolic 75)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Bulgaria: Iliev - Cicinho, Terziev, Bozhikov, Nedyalkov, Karabelyov, Malinov, Karagaren (Despodov 58), Nedelev (Yankov 79), Ivanov (Yomov 31), Kraev (Isa Mustafa 79).
Hungary: Gulacsi - Orban, Lang, At. Szalai (Nikolic 59), Fiola (Botka 82), Nagy (Gazdag 82), Siger, Holender (Nego 70), Sallai, Kalmar (Hangya 70), Ad. Szalai.

Oct 8 - Reykjavik
Iceland 2 (G. Sigurdsson 16, 34)
Romania 1 (Maxim 63 pen)
HT: 2-0 **Ref:** Skomina (Svn)
Iceland: Halldorsson - Palsson, Arnason (Ingason 86), R. Sigurdsson, Magnusson, Gudmundsson (Sigurjonsson 83), Gunnarsson, Bjarnason, Traustason, Finnbogason (Sigthorsson 75), G. Sigurdsson.
Romania: Tatarusanu - Manea, Balasca, Burca, Camora, Stanciu (Cicaldau 87), Cretu, Maxim (Keseru 80), Deac (Iancu 46), Alibec (Puscas 46), Mitrita (Hagi 46).

Path B

Oct 8 - Sarajevo
Bosnia & Herzegovina 1 (Krunic 13)
Northern Ireland 1* (McGinn 53)
'Northern Ireland win 4-3 on penalties (aet)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Lahoz (Spa)
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic - Cipetic, Ahmedhodzic, Sanicanin, Kolasinac (Hajradinovic 119), Cimirot (Loncar 106), Hadziahmetovic (Gojak 83), Pjanic, Visca, Dzeko, Krunic (Hotic 88).
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell - Dallas, Cathcart, J. Evans, Lewis, C. Evans (Whyte 73), Davis, Saville, McGinn (Jones 82, Washington 120+1), McNair (Thompson 90+2, Boyce 120+1), Magennis (Lafferty (90+2).

Oct 8 - Bratislava
Slovakia 0*
Republic of Ireland 0
'Slovakia win 4-2 on penalties (aet)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Slovakia: Rodak - Pekarik, Vavro (Gyomber 112), Valjent, Mazan, Kucka (Gregus 86), Hrosovsky, Hamsik, Rusnak (Mak 86), Duda (Bozenik 107), Mihalik (Haraslin 74).
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - Doherty, Duffy, Egan, Stevens, McCarthy (Browne 60), Hourihane, Robinson (O'Dowda 100), Hendrick, McClean (Brady 60), McGoldrick (Long 112).

Path C

Oct 8 - Oslo
Norway 1 (Normann 88)
Serbia 2 (Milinkovic-Savic 81, 102)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Norway: Jarstein - Elabdellaoui (Thorsby 116), Reginiussen (Strandberg 90), Ajer, Aleesami (Linnes 105), Odegaard (Elyounoussi 111), Berge, Henriksen (Normann 45), Johansen (King 66), Sorloth, Haaland.
Serbia: Rajkovic - Milenkovic, Mitrovic, Kolarov, Lazovic (Gacinovic 105), Tadic (Lukic 119), Maksimovic (Milivojevic 80), Gudelj, Ristic, Djuricic (Milinkovic-Savic 80), Mitrovic.

Oct 8 - Glasgow
Scotland 0*
Israel 0
'Scotland win 5-3 on penalties (aet)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)
Scotland: Marshall - McTominay, Gallagher, Cooper, O'Donnell (McLean 113), Jack (Fraser 83), McGregor, Robertson, McGinn, Dykes (Paterson 90), McBurnie (Shankland 73).
Israel: Marciano - Dasa, Bitton, Tibi, Yeini, Elhamed, Golasa (Elmkies 101), Natcho (Abu Fani 69), Solomon, Dabbur (Weissman 83), Zahavi.

Path D

Oct 8 - Tbilisi
Georgia 1 (Okriashvili 7 pen)
Belarus 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Georgia: Loria - Kakabadze (Tabidze 82), Kashia, Kvirkvelia, Dvali, Kvekveskiri, Kankava, Kvaratskhelia (Lobzhanidze 89), Kiteishvili (Gvilia 65), Qazaishvili (Shengelia 81), Okriashvili (Kvilitaia 89).
Belarus: Khatkevich - Zolotov, Martynovich, Naumov, Bordachev (Pechenin 74), Bakhar (Podstrelov 63), Ebong, Yablonski (Skavysh 63), Nekhajchik, Khachaturyan (Maevski 46), Lisakovich (Laptev 70).

Oct 8 - Skopje
North Macedonia 2 (Kololli 15 og, Velkovski 33)
Kosovo 1 (Hadergjonaj 29)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – Bejtulai (Ristevski 51), Velkovski, Musliu, Ristovski (Kostadinov 88), Ademi (Spirovski 80), Nikolov, Alioski, Bardhi, Nestorovski (Trajkovski 88), Pandev (Trickovski 80).
Kosovo: Muric - Vojvoda (Zhegrova 64), Dresevic, Aliti, Kololli, Shala (Paqarada 87), Berisha, Hadergjonaj, Celina (Katrati 75), Zeneli, Nuhiu (Rashani 46).

WORLD CUP 2022 QUALIFIERS

SOUTH AMERICA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

Oct 8 - Montevideo
Uruguay 2 (Suarez 39 pen, Maxi Gomez 90+3)
Chile 1 (Sanchez 54)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)
Uruguay: Campana - Caceres, Godin, Coates, Vina, Valverde, Bentancur (Arambarri 76), B. Rodriguez (Maxi Gomez 87), De Arrascaeta (J. Rodriguez 76), De la Cruz (Nandez 56), Suarez.
Chile: Arias - P. Diaz, Sierralta, Vegas, N. Diaz (Roco 83), Fuenzalida (Pinares 68), Vidal, Baeza, Aranguiz, Sanchez, Vargas (Davila 68).

Oct 8 - Asuncion
Paraguay 2 (Angel Romero 66, 81)
Peru 2 (Carrillo 52, 85)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Paraguay: Fernandez - Espinola, Gomez, Alonso, Riveros, Gimenez (Ortiz 81), Cubas (Sanchez 62), Almiron (Sanabria 90+7), Villasanti, Perez (Romero 63), Lezcano (Bobadilla 63).
Peru: Gallese - Advincula, Zambrano, Abram, Trauco, Tapia (Pena 87), Carillo (Lopez 87), Aquino, Yotun (Polo 87), Cueva (Farfan 64), Ruidiaz (Gonzales 74).

Oct 9 - Buenos Aires
Argentina 1 (Messi 13 pen)
Ecuador 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)
Argentina: Armani - Montiel (Foyth 84), Lucas Martinez, Otamendi, Tagliafico, De Paul, Paredes, Acuna (Salvio 66), Ocampos (Dominguez 84), Messi, Lautaro Martinez (Alario 76).
Ecuador: Dominguez - Ferigra (Preciado 46), Arboleda, Arriaga, Estupinan, Gruezo, A. Ibarra (Plata 64), Franco, Caicedo (R. Ibarra 79), Mena (Estrada 87), Valencia.

Oct 10 - Barranquilla
Colombia 3 (Zapata 16, Muriel 26, 45+3)
Venezuela 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Ecu)
Colombia: Vargas - Arias (Medina 13), Mina, Sanchez, Mojica, Barrios, Lerma, Cuadrado (Morelos 59), James (Alzate 74), Muriel (Fabra 59), Zapata (Falcao 74).
Venezuela: Farinez - Hernandez, Chancellor, Angel, Rosales (Feltscher 79), Herrera, Rincon, Murillo (Anor 82), Savarino (Otero 67), Machis (Casseres 78), Cordova (Ponce 67).

Oct 10 - Sao Paulo
Brazil 5 (Marquinhos 16, Firmino 30, 49, Carrasco 66 og, Coutinho 73)
Bolivia 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Gonzalez (Uru)
Brazil: Weverton - Danilo, Marquinhos, Thiago Silva (Felipe 71), Lodi (Telles 77), Casemiro, Douglas Luiz, Coutinho (Everton Ribeiro 77), Everton (Rodrygo 59), Neymar, Firmino (Richarlison 71).
Bolivia: Lampe - Jesus Sagredo, Carrasco, Valverde, Jose Sagredo, Arabe (Cardozo 63), Bustamante (Gonzales 80), Wayar (Zabala 84), Saldias (Cespedes 46), Miranda, Menacho (Campos 62).

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA SUPER CUP 2020

Sep 24 - Budapest
Bayern Munich 2 (Goretzka 34, Martinez 104)
Sevilla 1 (Ocampos 13)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Bayern Munich: Neuer - Pavard, Sule, Alaba, Hernandez (Martinez 99), Goretzka (Davies 99), Kimmich, Gnabry, Muller, Sane (Tolisso 70), Lewandowski.
Sevilla: Bono - Navas, Kounde, Diego Carlos, Escudero, Jordan (Vazquez 94), Fernando, Rakitic (Torres 56), Suso (Gudelj 73), De Jong (En-Nesyri 56), Ocampos.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

Play-Off Round

Sep 22: Slavia Prague (Cze) 0 Midtjylland (Den) 0; Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 1 Red Bull Salzburg (Aut) 2; Krasnodar (Rus) 2 PAOK (Gre) 1
Sep 23: Olympiakos (Gre) 2 Omonia (Cyp) 0; Molde (Nor) 3 Ferencvaros (Hun) 3; Gent (Bel) 1 Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 2
Sep 29: Omonia 0 Olympiakos 0 (*Agg 0-2*); Ferencvaros* 0 Molde 0 (*Agg 3-3*); Dynamo Kiev 3 Gent 0 (*Agg 5-1*)
'Ferencvaros go through on away goals
Sep 30: Midtjylland 4 Slavia Prague 1 (*Agg 4-1*); Red Bull Salzburg 3 Maccabi Tel Aviv 1 (*Agg 5-2*); PAOK 1 Krasnodar 2 (*Agg 2-4*)

EUROPA LEAGUE 2020-21

Play-Off Round Champions Path

Oct 1: Young Boys (Sui) 3 Tirana (Alb) 0; Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 3 Flora (Est) 1; Cluj (Rou) 3 KuPS (Fin) 1; Ararat-Armenia (Arm) 1 Red Star Belgrade (Srb) 2; Dynamo Brest (Blr) 0 Ludogorets (Bul) 2; Sarajevo (Bih) 0 Celtic (Sco) 1; Legia Warsaw (Pol) 0 Qarabag (Aze) 3; Dundalk (Irl) 3 KI (Fro) 1

Play-Off Round Main Path

Oct 1: Hapoel Be'er Sheva (Isr) 1 Viktoria Plzen (Cze) 0; Basle (Sui) 1 CSKA Sofia (Bul) 3; Rio Ave (Por) 2 Milan (Ita) 2(p) (*aet*); Rosenborg (Nor) 0 PSV (Ned) 2; Sporting (Por) 1 LASK (Aut) 4; Copenhagen (Den) 0 Rijeka (Cro) 1; AEK Athens (Gre) 2 Wolfsburg (Ger) 1; Charleroi (Bel) 1 Lech Poznan (Pol) 2; Malmo (Swe) 1 Granada (Spa) 3; Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 7 Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 2; Slovan Liberec (Cze) 1 APOEL (Cyp) 0; Standard Liege (Bel) 3 Fehervar (Hun) 1; Rangers (Sco) 2 Galatasaray (Tur) 1

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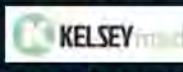

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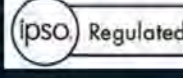

Iconic venue...Staging the 2020 UEFA Super Cup

PUSKAS ARENA

Location: Budapest, Hungary
Team: N/A
Built: 2019
Capacity: 67,215

Built on the site of the old 100,000-capacity Ferenc Puskas Stadium, the new Puskas Arena hosted the 2020 UEFA Super Cup in September.

Originally scheduled to be held on August 12 at the Estadio do Dragao in Porto, Portugal, this year's clash was moved due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lit up...The stunning view from outside

Historic... Hungary and Uruguay played in the stadium's first game

It turned out to be a landmark occasion, as 15,180 supporters were allowed into the ground, making it the first major European match to allow fans since the game was forced into lockdown.

Situated in Zuglo, the 14th district of Budapest, the stadium was named in honour of legendary former player Ferenc Puskas. He scored 84 goals in just 85 matches for his country.

The 67,215-seater stadium is down to host four matches at Euro 2020, as well as the 2023 Europa League final. The Hungarian Football Federation are expecting it to be awarded a five-star rating, which would be a considerable boost ahead of the landmark occasions.

Ecstatic...Bayern beat Sevilla to win the 2020 UEFA Super Cup

GREATEST GAMES

2002 August 14 Zalaegerszegi TE 1-0 Manchester United

In August 2002, ZTE hosted Manchester United in the third round of the 2002-03 Champions League qualifiers at the old Ferenc Puskas Stadium. Sir Alex Ferguson named the likes of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, David Beckham, Ryan Giggs and Ruud van Nistelrooy in his line-up, but a last-minute strike from Bela Koplarovics condemned them to a shock first-leg defeat in Hungary.

2019 November 15 Hungary 1-2 Uruguay

The new Puskas Arena hosted its first game on November 15, 2019, as Hungary played Uruguay in a friendly in front of a record 65,114 crowd. Uruguay striker Edinson Cavani opened the scoring, before Brian Rodriguez added a second six minutes later. Adam Szalai did pull a goal back for the hosts midway through the first half, but it wasn't enough to inspire a comeback.

2020 September 24 Bayern Munich 2-1 Sevilla (a.e.t.)

Bayern Munich added the UEFA Super Cup to their Champions League and Bundesliga trophies. Lucas Ocampos gave Sevilla the lead after 13 minutes from the penalty spot, but Leon Goretzka's 34th-minute equaliser forced the game into extra-time. The Bavarians were able to clinch victory and add another trophy to their collection courtesy of Javi Martinez's 104th-minute header.

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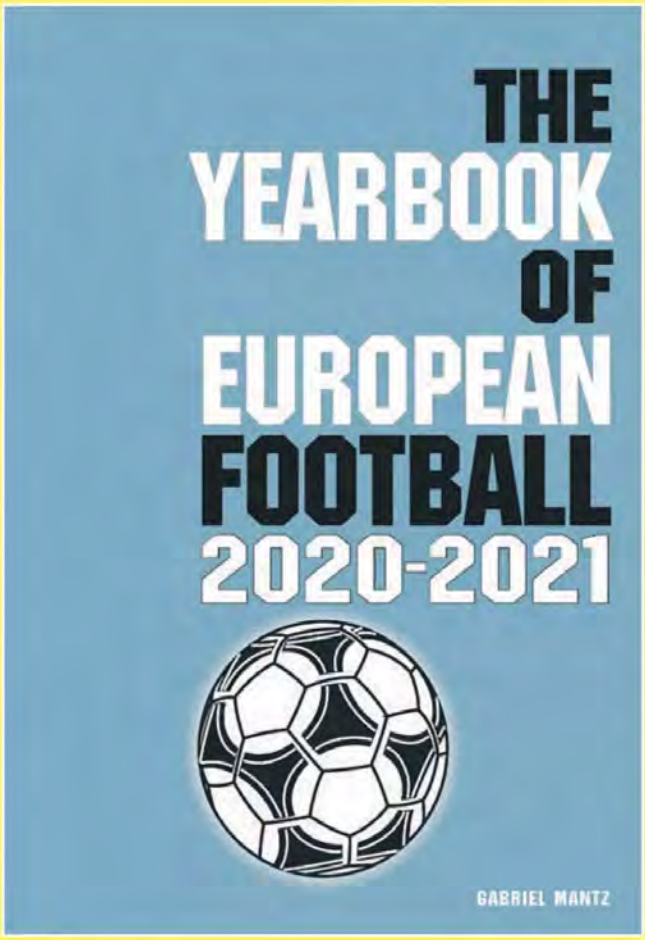

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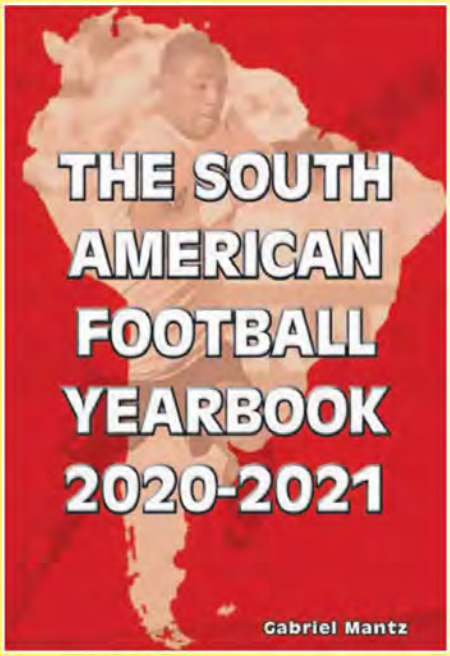

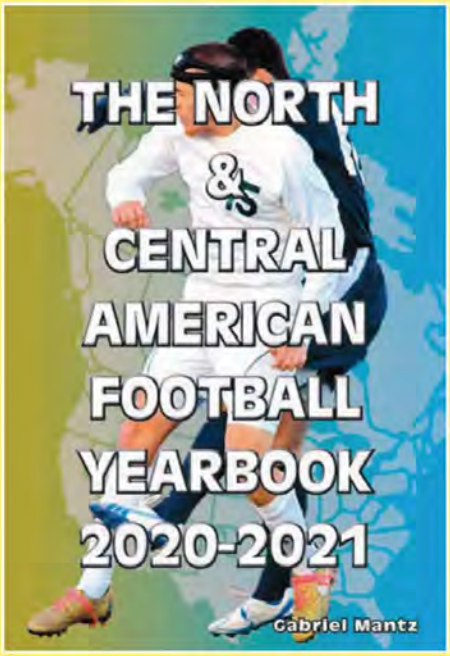

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